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CHAPTERS

ON

CHURCHYARDS.

BY
Mrs. CAROLINE SOUTHEY,
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TO

CAROLINE BOWLES.

Could I look forward to a distant day
With hope of building some elaborate lay,
Then would I wait till worthier strains of mine
Might bear inscribed thy name, O Caroline!
For I would, while my voice is heard on earth,
Bear witness to thy genius and thy worth.
But we have both been taught to feel with fear,
How frail the tenure of existence here,
What unforseen calamities prevent,
Alas! how oft, the best resolved intent;
And therefore this poor volume* I address
To thee, dear friend, and sister Poetess.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.

Keswick, 21 *Feb.*, 1829.

* All for Love, or a Sinner well saved.

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CHAPTERS

ON

CHURCHYARDS.

CHAPTER I.

MANY are the idle tourists who have babbled of country churchyards—many are the able pens which have been employed on the same subjects. *One* in particular, in the delightful olio of the "Sketch-book," has traced a picture so true to nature, so beautifully simple and pathetic, that succeeding essayists might well despair of success in attempting similar descriptions, were not the theme, in fact, inexhaustible, a source of endless variety, a volume of instructive records, whereof those marked with least incident are yet replete with interest for that human being who stands alone amongst the quiet graves, musing on the mystery of his own existence, and on the past and present state of those poor relics of mortality which every where surround him, mouldering beneath his feet—mingling with the common soil—feeding the rank churchyard vegetation—once sentient like himself with vigorous life, subject to all the tumultuous passions that agitate his own heart, pregnant with a thousand busy schemes, elevated and depressed by alternate hopes and fears—liable, in a word, to all the pains, the pleasures, and "the ills, that flesh is heir to."

The leisurely traveller arriving at a country inn, with the intention of tarrying a day, an hour, or a yet shorter

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period, in the town or village, generally finds time to saunter towards the church, and even to loiter about its surrounding graves, as if his nature (solitary in the midst of the living crowd) claimed affinity, and sought communion, with the populous dust beneath his feet.

Such, at least, are the feelings with which I have often lingered in the churchyard of a strange place, and about the church itself—to which, indeed, in all places, and in all countries, the heart of the Christian pilgrim feels itself attracted as towards his very home, for there at least, though alone amongst a strange people, he is no stranger: It is his Father's house.

I am not sure that I heartily approve the custom—rare in this country, but frequent in many others—of planting flowers and flowering shrubs about the graves. I am *quite* sure that I hate all the sentimental mummery with which the far-famed burying-place of the Pere la Chaise is garnished out. It is faithfully in keeping with Parisian taste, and perfectly in unison with French feeling; but I should wonder at the profound sympathy with which numbers of my own countrymen expatiate on that pleasure-ground of Death, if it were still possible to feel surprise at any instance of degenerate taste and perverted feeling in our travelled islanders—if it were not, too, the vulgarest thing in the world to wonder at any thing.

The custom, so general in Switzerland, and so common in our own principality of Wales, of strewing flowers over the graves of departed friends, either on the anniversaries of their deaths, or on other memorable days, is touching and beautiful. Those frail blossoms scattered over the green sod, in their morning freshness, but for a little space retain their balmy odours, and their glowing tints, till the sun goes down, and the breeze of evening sighs over them, and the dews of night fall on their pale beauty, and the withered and fading wreath becomes a yet more appropriate tribute to the silent dust beneath. But rose-trees in full bloom, and tall staring lilies, and flaunting lilacs, and pert priggish spirafrutexes, are, methinks, ill in harmony with that holiness of perfect repose which should pervade the

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last resting-place of mortality. Even in our own unsentimental England, I have seen two or three of these flower-plot graves. One, in particular, I remember, had been planned and planted by a young disconsolate widow, to the memory of her deceased partner. The tomb itself was a common square erection of freestone, covered over with a slab of black marble, on which, under the name, age, &c., of the defunct, was engraven an elaborate epitaph, commemorating his many virtues, and pathetically intimating, that, at no distant period, the vacant space remaining on the same marble would receive the name of "his inconsolable Eugenia." The tomb was hedged about by a basket-work of honey-suckles. A Persian lilac drooped over its foot, and, at the head, (substituted for the elegant cypress, coy denizen of our ungenial clime,) a young poplar perked up its pyramidical form. Divers other shrubs and flowering plants completed the ring-fence, plentifully interspersed with "the fragrant weed, the Frenchman's darling," whose perfume, when I visited the spot, was wafted over the whole churchyard. It was then the full flush of summer. The garden had been planted but a month; but the lady had tended, and propped, and watered those gay strangers with her own delicate hands, evermore in the dusk of evening returning to her tender task, so that they had taken their removal kindly, and grew and flourished as carelessly round that cold marble, and in that field of graves, as they had done heretofore in their own sheltered nursery.

A year afterwards—a year almost to a day—I stood once more on that same spot, in the same month—"the leafy month of June." But—it was leafless there. The young poplar still stood sentinel in its former station, but dry, withered, and sticky, like an old broom at the mast-head of a vessel on sale. The parson's cow, and his half score fatting wethers, had violated the sacred enclosure, and trodden down its flowery basket-work into the very soil. The plants and shrubs were nibbled down to miserable stumps, and from the sole survivor, the poor straggling lilac, a fat old waddling ewe had just cropped the last sickly flower-branch, and stood staring at me with a pathetic vacancy of counte-

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nance, the half-munched consecrated blossom dangling from her sacrilegious jaws. "And is it even so?" I half-articulated, with a sudden thrill of irrepressible emotion. "Poor widowed mourner! lovely Eugenia! Art thou already reunited to the object of thy faithful affection? And so lately! Not yet on that awaiting space on the cold marble have they inscribed thy gentle name. And those fragile memorials! were there none to tend them for thy sake?" Such was my sentimental apostrophe; and the unwonted impulse so far incited me, that I actually pelted away the sheep from that last resting-place of faithful love, and reared against its side the trailing branches of the neglected lilac. Well satisfied with myself for the performance of this pious act, I turned from the spot in a mood of calm, pleasing melancholy, that, by degrees, (while I yet lingered about the churchyard,) resolved itself into a train of poetic reverie, and I was already far advanced in a sort of elegiac tribute to the memory of that fair being, whose tender nature had sunk under the stroke "that reft her mutual heart," when the horrid interruption of a loud shrill whistle startled me from my poetic vision, cruelly disarranging the beautiful combination of high-wrought tender, pathetic feelings, which were flowing naturally into verse, as from the very fount of Helicon. Lifting my eyes towards the vulgar cause of this vulgar disturbance, the cow-boy (for it was he, "who whistled as he went, for want of thought") nodded to me his rustic apology for a bow, and passed on towards the very tomb I had just quitted, near which his milky charge, the old brindled cow, still munched on, avaricious of the last mouthful. If the clown's obstreperous mirth had before broken in on my mood of inspiration, its last delicate glow was utterly dispelled by the uncouth vociferation, and rude expletives, with which he proceeded to dislodge the persevering animal from her rich pasture-ground. Insensible alike to his remonstrances, his threats, or his tender persuasion—to his "Whoy! whoy, old girl! Whoy, Blossom! Whoy, my lady!—I say, come up, do; come up, ye plaguey baste!" Blossom continued to munch and ruminate with the most imperturbable calmness—backing and sideling

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away, however, as her pursuer made nearer advances, and ever and anon looking up at him with most provoking assurance, as if to calculate how many tufts she might venture to pull before he got fairly within reach of her. And so, retrograding and manœuvring, she at last intrenched herself behind the identical tombstone beside which I had stood so lately in solemn contemplation. Here—the cowboy's patience being completely exhausted—with the intention of switching old Blossom from her last stronghold, he caught up, and began tearing from the earth, that one long straggling stem of lilac which I had endeavoured to replace in somewhat of its former position. "Hold! hold!" I cried, springing forward with the vehement gesture of impassioned feeling—"have you no respect for the ashes of the dead? Dare you thus violate with sacrilegious hands the last sad sanctuary of faithful love?" The boy stood like one petrified, stared at me for a moment with a look of indescribable perplexity, then screwing one corner of his mouth almost into contact with the corresponding corner of one crinkled-up eye—at the same time shoving up his old ragged hat, and scratching his curly pate; and having, as I suppose, by the help of that operation, construed my vehement address into the language of inquiry, he set himself very methodically about satisfying my curiosity on every point wherever he conceived it possible I might have interrogated him—taking his cue, with some ingenuity, from the one word of my oration which was familiar to his ear—"Dead! Ees, Squoire been dead twelve months last Whitsuntide; and thick be his'n moniment, an' madam was married last week to our measter, an' thick be our cow—"

Oh, Reader!

Is it to be wondered at, that, since that adventure, I have ever been disposed to look wth an *un*glisteniing, and even cynical eye, on those same flower-plot graves? Nay, that at sight of them I feel an extraordinary degree of hardheartedness stealing over me? I cannot quit the subject without offering a word or two of well-meant advice to all disconsolate survivors—widows more especially—as to the expediency or non-expediency of indulging this flowery

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grief. Possibly, were I to obey the dictates of my own tastes and feelings, I should say, "Be content with a simple record—perhaps a scriptural sentence, on a plain headstone. Suffer not the inscription to become defaced and illegible, nor rank weeds to wave over it; and smooth be the turf of the green hillock! But if—to use a French phrase—*Il faut afficher ses regrets*—if there *must* be *effect*, sentimentalities, prettinesses, urns, flowers—not only a few scattered blossoms, but a regular planted border, like the garnish of a plateau—then, let me beseech you, fair inconsolables! be cautious in your proceedings. Temper with discreet foresight (if that be possible) the first agonizing burst of sensibility—Take the counsels of sage experience—temporize with the as yet unascertained nature of your own feelings—Proclaim not those vegetable vows of eternal fidelity—Refrain, at least, from the trowel and the spade—Dig not—plant not—For one year only—for the *first* year, at least—For one year only, I beseech you—sow annuals."

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CHAPTER II.

In parts of Warwickshire, and some of the adjacent counties, more especially in the churchyards of the larger towns, the frightful fashion of black tombstones is almost universal. Black tombstones, tall and slim, and lettered in gold, looking, for all the world, like bolt upright coffin lids. I marvel the worthy natives do not go a step farther in their tasteful system, and coat their churches over with the same lugubrious hue, exempting only the brass weathercocks, and the gilded figures on the clock faces. The whole scene would unquestionably be far more in keeping, and even sublime in stupendous ugliness. Some village burying-grounds have, however, escaped this barbarous adornment; and in Warwickshire particularly, and within the circuit of a few miles round Warwick itself, are very many small, picturesque, hamlet churches, each surrounded by its lowly flock of green graves, and grey headstones; the churchyards, for the most part, separated only by a sunk fence, or a slight railing, from the little sheltered grass-plot of a small neat rectory, the casements of which generally front the long east window of the church. I like this proximity of the pastor's dwelling to his Master's house; nay, of the abode of the living to the sanctuary of the dead. It seems to me to remove in part the great barrier of separation between the two worlds. The end of life, it is true, lies before us. The end of *this* life, with all its host of vanities and perturbations; but immediately from thence we step upon the threshold of the holy place, before the gates of which no commissioned angel stands with a flaming sword, barring our entrance to the tree of life. It would seem to me that thus abiding, as it were, under the very shadow of the sacred walls, and within sight of man's last earthly resting-place, I should feel, as in a charmed circle, more

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secure from the power of evil influences, than if exposed to their assaults, on the great open desert of the busy world. Therefore, I like this proximity so frequently observable in the little hamlets I have described. In one or two instances, indeed, I perceived that attempts had been made to exclude the view of the church and churchyard from the rectory windows, by planting a few clumps of evergreens, that looked as unmeaningly stuck there as heart could wish. Miserable taste that! "but let it pass," as the Courier said lately of one of your finest poetical articles, Mr. North.

I never saw a more perfect picture of beautiful repose, than presented itself to me in one of my evening walks last summer. One of the few evening walks it was possible to enjoy during the nominal reign of that freezing, dripping summer.

I came abruptly upon a small church, and burial ground, and rectory, all combined and embowered within a space that the eye could take in at one glance, and a pleasant glance it was!

The west window of the church was lighted up with red and glowing effulgence—not with the gorgeous hues of artificial colouring, but with the bright banners of the setting sun; and strongly-defined shadows, and mouldings of golden light, marked out by the rude tracery of the low ivied tower, and the heavy stone-work of the deep narrow windows, and the projections of the low massy buttresses, irregularly applied, in defiance of all architectural proportion, as they had become necessary to the support of the ancient edifice. And here and there on the broken slanting of the buttresses, and on their projecting ledges, might be seen patches of green and yellow moss, so exquisitely bright, that methought the jewelry with which Aladdin enchased the windows of his enchanted palace, was dull and colourless compared with the vegetable emeralds and topases, wherewith "Nature's own sweet and cunning hand" had blazoned that old church. And the low headstones also—some half-sunk into the churchyard mould—many carved out into cherubim, with their trumpeters' cheeks and expanded wings, or with the awful emblems of death's-heads,

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cross-bones, and hour-glasses! The low headstones, with their rustic scrolls, "that teach us to live and die," those also were edged and tinted with the golden gleam, and it stretched in long floods of amber light athwart the soft green turf, kissing the nameless hillocks; and, on one little grave in particular, (it must have been that of an infant,) methought the departing glory lingered with peculiar brightness. Oh! it was a beautiful churchyard. A stream of running water intersected it almost close to the church wall. It was clear as crystal, running over grey pebbles, with a sound that chimed harmoniously in with the general character of the scene, low, soothing, monotonous, dying away into a liquid whisper, as the rivulet shrank into a shallow and still shallower channel, matted with moss and water plants, and closely overhung by the low underwood of an adjoining coppice, within whose leafy labyrinth it stole at last silently away. It was an unusual and a lovely thing to see the grave-stones, and the green hillocks, with the very wild-flowers (daisies and buttercups) growing on them, reflected in the little rill as it wound among them—the reversed objects, and glancing colours, shifting, blending, and trembling, in the broken ripple. *That* and the voice of the water! It was "Life in Death." One *felt* that the sleepers below were but gathered for a while into their quiet chambers. Nay, their very sleep was not voiceless. On the edges of the graves—on the moist margin of the stream, grew many tufts of the beautiful "Forget me not." Never, sure, was such appropriate station for that meek eloquent flower!

Such was the churchyard, from which, at about ten yards' distance from the church, a slight low railing, with a latch wicket, divided off a patch of the loveliest green sward, (yet but a continuation of the churchyard turf,) backed with tall elm, and luxuriant evergreens, amongst which peeped modestly out the little neat rectory. It was constructed of the same rough grey stone with the church. Long, low, with far projecting eaves, and casement windows facing that large west window of the church, still flaming with the reflected splendour of the setting sun.

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His orb was sinking to rest behind the grove, half-embowering the small dwelling, which stood in the perfect quietness of its own shadow, the dark green masses of jasmine, clustering round its porch and windows, scarcely revealing (but by their exquisite odour) the pure white blossoms that starred "its lovely gloom."

But their fragrance floated on the gentle breath of evening, mingled with the perfume of mignonette, and the long-fingered marvels of Peru, (the pale daughters of twilight,) and innumerable sweet flowers, blooming in their beds of rich black mould, close under the lattice windows. These were all flung wide, for the evening was still and sultry; and one, opening down to the ground, showed the interior of a very small parlour, plainly and modestly furnished, but panelled all round with well-filled book-cases. A lady's harp stood in one corner, and in another two fine globes, and an orrery. Some small flower-baskets, filled with roses, were dispersed about the room; and at a table near the window sat a gentleman writing, or rather leaning over a writing desk with a pen in his hand, for his eyes were directed towards the gravel-walk before the window, where a lady—an elegant-looking woman, whose plain white robe and dark uncovered hair well became the sweet matronly expression of her face and figure—was anxiously stretching out her encouraging arms to her little daughter, who came laughing and tottering towards her on the soft green turf, her tiny feet, as they essayed their first independent steps in the eventful walk of life, twisting and turning with graceful awkwardness, and unsteady pressure, under the disproportionate weight of her fair fat person. It was a sweet, heart-thrilling sound, the joyous, crowing laugh of that little creature, when with one last, bold, mighty effort, she reached the maternal arms, and was caught up to the maternal bosom, and half-devoured with kisses, in an ecstasy of unspeakable love.

As if provoked to emulous loudness by that mirthful outcry, and impatient to mingle its clear notes with that young, innocent voice, a blackbird, embowered in a tall, neighbouring bay-tree, poured out forthwith such a flood of full, rich

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melody, as stilled the baby's laugh, and for a moment arrested its observant ear.—But for a *moment*.—The kindred natures burst out into full chorus;—the baby clapped her hands, and laughed aloud, and after her fashion, mocked the unseen songstress. The bird redoubled her tuneful efforts; and still the baby laughed, and still the bird rejoined; and both together raised such a melodious din that the echoes of the old church rang again; and never since the contest of the nightingale with her human rival, was heard such an emulous conflict of musical skill.

I could have laughed for company, from my unseen lurking-place, within the dark shadow of one of the church buttresses. It was altogether such a scene as I shall never forget—one from which I could hardly tear myself away. Nay, I did not. I stood motionless as a statue in my dark-grey niche, till the objects before me became indistinct in twilight—till the last slanting sunbeams had withdrawn from the highest panes of the church window—till the blackbird's song was hushed, and the baby's voice was still, and the mother and her nursling had retreated into their quiet dwelling, and the evening taper gleamed through the fallen white curtain, and still open window. But yet before that curtain fell, another act of the beautiful pantomime had passed in review before me. The mother, with her infant in her arms, had seated herself in a low chair within the little parlour. She untied the frock-strings, drew off that and the second upper garments dexterously, and at intervals, as the restless frolics of the still unwearied babe afforded opportunity; and there it was in its little coat and stay, the fat white shoulders shrugged up in antic merriment far above the slackened shoulder-straps. Then the mother's hand slipped off one soft red shoe; and, having done so, her lips were pressed, almost, as it seemed, involuntarily, to the little naked foot she still held. The other, as if in proud love of liberty, had spurned off to a distance the fellow shoe; and now the darling, disarrayed for its innocent slumbers, was hushed and quieted, but not yet to rest; the night-dress was still to be put on, and the little crib was not there:—not yet to rest, but to the mighty duty already

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required of the young Christian!—And in a moment it was hushed—and in a moment the small hands were pressed together between the mother's hands, and the sweet serious eyes were raised and fixed upon the mother's eyes, (there beamed, as yet, the infant's heaven,) and one saw that it was lisping out its unconscious prayer—unconscious, not surely unaccepted. A kiss from the maternal lips was the token of God's approval:—and then she rose, and, gathering up the scattered garments in the same clasp with the half-naked babe, she held it smiling to its father, and one saw in the expression of his face, as he upraised it after having imprinted a kiss on that of his child—one saw in it all the holy fervour of a father's blessing.

Then the mother withdrew with her little one—and then the curtain fell,—and still I lingered; for, after the interval of a few minutes, sweet sounds arrested my departing footsteps. A few notes of the harp, a low prelude stole sweetly out—a voice still sweeter, mingling its tones with a simple, quiet accompaniment, swelled out gradually into a strain of sacred harmony, and the words of the evening hymn came wafted towards the house of prayer. Then all was still in the cottage, and around it; and the perfect silence, and the deepening shadows, brought to my mind more forcibly the lateness of the hour, and warned me to turn my face homewards. So I moved a few steps, and yet again I lingered, lingered still; for the moon was rising, and the stars were shining out in the clear, cloudless heaven, and the bright reflection of one danced and glittered like a liquid fire-fly, on the ripple of the stream, just where it glided into a darker, deeper pool, beneath a little rustic footbridge, which led from the churchyard into a shady green lane, communicating with the neighbouring hamlet.

On that bridge I stopped a minute longer—and yet another and another minute—for I listened to the voice of the running water: and methought it was yet more mellifluous, more soothing, more eloquent, at that still shadowy hour, when only that little star looked down upon it with its tremulous beam, than when it danced and glittered in the

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warm glow of sunshine. There are hearts like that stream, and they will understand the metaphor.

The unutterable things I felt and heard in that mysterious music!—Every sense became absorbed in that of hearing; and so spell-bound, I might have stayed on that very spot till midnight, nay, till the stars paled before the morning beam, if the deep, solemn sound of the old church clock had not broken in on my dream of profound abstraction, and startled me away with half incredulous surprise, as its iron tongue proclaimed, stroke after stroke, the tenth hour of the night.

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CHAPTER III.

WITHIN a short distance of my own habitation stands a picturesque old church, remote from any town or hamlet, save that village of the dead contained within the precincts of its own sequestered burial-ground. It is, however, the parish church of a large rural district comprising several small hamlets, and numerous farms and cottages, together with the scattered residences of the neighbouring gentry; and hither (there being no other place of worship within the parish boundary) its population may be seen for the most part resorting on Sundays, by various roads, lanes, heath-tracks, coppice and field-paths, all diverging from that consecrated centre. The church itself, nearly in the midst of a very beautiful churchyard, rich in old carved head-stones, and bright verdure roofing the nameless graves—the church itself stands on the brow of a finely wooded knoll, commanding a diversified expanse of heath, forest, and cultivated land; and it is a beautiful sight on Sundays, on a fine autumn Sunday in particular, when the ferns are assuming their rich browns, and the forest-trees their exquisite gradations of colour, such as no limner upon earth can paint—to see the people approaching in all directions, now winding in long straggling files over the open common, now abruptly disappearing amongst its innumerable shrubby declivities, and again emerging into sight through the boles of the old oaks that encircle the churchyard, standing in their majestic beauty, like sentinels over the slumbers of the dead. From two several quarters across the heath, approach the more condensed currents of the living stream; one, the inhabitants of a far distant hamlet, the other, comprising the population of two smaller ones within a shorter distance of the church. And from many lanes and leafy glades, and through many field-paths and stiles, advance

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small groups of neighbours, and families, and social pairs, and here and there a solitary aged person, who totters leisurely along, supported by his trusty companion, his stout oak staff, not undutifully consigned by his neglectful children to that silent companionship, but willingly loitering behind to enjoy the luxury of the aged, the warmth of the cheerful sunbeams, the serene beauty of nature, the fruitful aspect of the ripening corn-fields, the sound of near and mirthful voices, the voices of children and grandchildren, and a sense of quiet happiness, partaking surely of that peace which passeth all understanding.

And sometimes the venerable Elder comes, accompanied by his old faithful helpmate, and then they may be seen once more side by side, her arm again locked within his as in the days of courtship, not, as then, resting on his more vigorous frame, for they have grown old and feeble together; and of the twain, the burden of years lies heaviest upon the husband, for his has been the hardest portion of labour. In the prime of life, during the full flush of his manly vigour, and of her healthful comeliness, he was wont to walk sturdily onward, discoursing between-whiles with his buxom partner, as she followed with her little ones; but now they are grown up into men and women, dispersed about in their several stations, and have themselves young ones to care and provide for; and the old couple are, as it were, left to begin the world again, alone in their quiet cottage. Those two alone together, as when they entered it fifty years agone, bridegroom and bride—alone, but not forsaken—sons, and daughters, and grandchildren, as each can snatch an interval of leisure, or when the labours of the day are over, come dropping in under the honeysuckle porch, with their hearty greetings; and many a chubby great-grandchild finds its frequent way to Grannum's cottage; many a school truant, and many a "toddlin' wee thing," whose little hand can hardly reach the latch of the low wicket, but whose baby call of "flichterin' noise an' glee" gains free and fond admittance. And now they are on their way together, the old man and his wife. See!—they have just passed through the last field-gate leading

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thitherward to the church. They are on their way together towards the house of God, and towards the place where they shall soon lie down to rest "in sure and certain hope;" and they lean on one another for mutual support; and would it not seem as they are thus again drawn closer together, as they approach nearer to the term of their earthly union, as if it were a type and token of an eternal reunion in a better and a happier state?

I love to gaze upon that venerable pair—ay, even to note their decent, antiquated Sabbath raiment. What mortal tailor—no *modern one to-be-sure*—can have carved out that coat of indescribable colour—something of orange tawny with a reddish tinge! I suspect it has once been a rich Devonshire brown, and perhaps the wedding-suit of the squire's grandfather, for it *has had* a silk lining, and it *has been* trimmed with some sort of lace, gold probably; and there adown each side are still the resplendent rows of embossed, basket-work, gilt buttons, as large as crown-pieces: it must have been the squire's grandfather's wedding-suit. And how snowy-white, and how neatly plaited is the single edge of his old dame's plain mob cap, surmounted by that little black poke bonnet, flounced with rusty lace, and secured upon her head, not by strings, but by two long black corking pins! That bit of black lace, of *real* lace, is a treasured remnant of what once trimmed her mistress's best cloak, when she herself was a blithe and buxom lass, in the days of her happy servitude; and the very cloak itself, once a rich mode silk of ample dimensions, now narrowed and curtailed, to repair, with many cunning ingraftings, the ravages of time—the very cloak itself, with a scrap of the same lace frilled round the neck, is still worn on Sundays, through the summer and autumn, till early frosts and keener winds pierce through the thin old silk, and the good red-hooded cloak is substituted in its stead.

They have reached the churchyard wicket; they have passed through it now, and wherefore do they turn aside from the path, a few steps beyond it, and stop and look down upon that grassy hillock? It is no recent grave, the daisies are thickly matted on its green sod, and the heap

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itself has sunk to a level nearly even with the flat ground. The little headstone is half-buried too, but you may read thereon the few words, the only ones ever engraven there—"William Moss, aged 22." Few living now remember William Moss. Few at least think of him. The playmates of his childhood, the companions of his youth, his brothers and sisters, pass weekly by his lonely grave, and none turn aside to look upon it, or to think of him who sleeps beneath. But in the hearts of his parents the memory of their dead child is as fresh as their affections for their living children. He is not *dead to them*, though eight-and-twenty years ago they saw that turf heaped over his coffin—over the coffin of their eldest born. He is not dead to them; and every Sabbath-day they tarry a moment by his lowly grave, and even now, as they look thereon in silence, does not the heart of each parent whisper, as if to the sleeper below, "My son! we shall go to thee, though thou shalt not return to us."

Look down yonder under those arching hawthorns!—what mischief is confederating there amongst those sunburnt, curly-pated boys, clustering together, over the stile and about it, like a bunch of swarming bees? The confused sound of their voices is like the hum of a swarm too; and they are debating of grave and weighty matters—of nuts ripening in thick clusters down in Fairlee Copse—of trouts, of prodigious magnitude, leaping by the bridge below the Mill-head—of apples—and the young heads crowd closer together, and the buzzing voices sink to a whisper—"of cherry-cheeked apples, hanging just within reach of one who should climb upon the roof of the old shed, by the corner of the south wall of Squire Mills' orchard."—Ah, Squire Mills! I would not give sixpence for all the apples you shall gather off that famous red-streak to-morrow.

But who comes there across the field towards the stile? A very youthful couple—sweethearts, one should guess, if it were not that they were so far asunder, and look as if they had not spoken a word to each other this half hour. Ah! they were not so far asunder before they turned out of the shady lane into that open field, in sight of all the folk

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gathering into the churchyard, and of those mischievous boys, one of whom is brother to that pretty Fanny Payne, whose downcast looks, and grave sober walk, so far from the young miller, will not save her from running the gauntlet of their teasing jokes as she passes—and pass she must, through the knot of conspirators. Never mind it, Fanny Payne! put a good face on the matter, and, above all, beware of knitting up that fair brow into any thing like a frown, as you steal a passing glance at that provoking brother of yours; it will only bring down upon you a thicker shower of saucy jests.

See, see! that little old man—so old and shrivelled, and lean and wizen, and mummy-coloured; he looks as if he had been embalmed and inhumed a century ago, and had just now walked out of his swathing-bands, a specimen of the year one thousand seven hundred and ten. His periwig is so well plastered with flour and hog's lard, that its large sausage side-curls look as durably consistent, as the "eternal buckles cut in Parian stone" that have immortalized Sir Cloudesley Shovel; and from behind dangles halfway down his back, a long taper pig-tail, wound round with black riband, the which, about half-way, is tied into an elegant rosette. On the top of that same periwig is perched a diminutive cocked hat—with such a cock!—so fierce!—so triangular!—the little squat crown so buried within its triple fortification! The like was never seen, save in the shape of those coloured sugar comfits called cocked hats, that are stuck up in long glasses in the confectioners' windows, to attract the eyes of poor longing urchins; and his face is triangular too, the exact centre of his forehead, where it meets the periwig, being the apex thereof; his nose is triangular; his little red eyes are triangular; his person is altogether triangular, from the sloping narrow shoulders, to where it widens out, corresponding with the broad, square, fantail flaps of that green velveteen coat. He is a walking triangle! and he carries his cane behind him, holding it with both hands wide apart, exactly parallel with the square line of his coat flaps. See! he is bustling up to join that small group of substantial farmers, amongst whom he is evidently

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a person of no small consequence; they think him, "as one should say, Sir Oracle," for he knows every fluctuation of stocks to a fraction; criticises the minister's discourses; expounds the prophecies; explains all about the millennium, and the number of the beast; foretells changes of weather; knows something of physic and surgery; gives charms for the ague and rheumatiz; makes ink, mends pens, and writes a wonderful fine hand, with such flourishes, that, without taking his pen off the paper, he can represent the figures of Adam and Eve, in the involutions composing the initial capitals of their names! He *is* "Sir Oracle;" and not the less so, because people do not exactly know what he has been, and where he comes from. Some think he has been a schoolmaster; others conjecture that he has been a doctor of some sort, or a schemer in mechanics, about which he talks very scientifically; or in the funds; or in some foreign commercial concern; for he has certainly lived long in foreign parts, and is often heard talking to his old grey parrot in some outlandish tongue, and the bird seems to understand it well, and replies in the same language.

There are not wanting some who suspect that he has not been always in his perfect mind; but however that may be, he is perfectly harmless now, and has conducted himself unexceptionably ever since he came to settle in the village of Downe, ten years ago. In all that time he has never been known to receive within his dwelling any former friend or kinsman, and he has never stirred beyond the boundary of the parish, but to go once a-year to the banker's in the nearest town, to receive a small sum of money, for which he draws on a mercantile house in Lombard Street. He boards and lodges with a widow who has a neat little cottage in the village, and he cultivates the finest polyanthuses and auriculas in the flower-plot, of which she has yielded up the management to him, that were ever beheld in that neighbourhood. He is very fond of flowers, and dumb animals, and children; and all the children in the place love him, and the old white Pomeranian dog, blind of one eye, who follows his master every where except to

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church. Now, you know as much as I or any one knows of Master Jacob Marks, more, perhaps, than was worth telling, but I could not leave such an original subject half-sketched.

Behold that jolly-looking farmer and his family approaching up the green lane that leads from their habitation, that old substantial-looking farm-house yonder, half embowered in its guardian elms.

They are a portly couple, the farmer and his wife! He a hale, florid, fine-looking man, on whose broad open brow time has scarcely imprinted a furrow, though it has changed to silky whiteness the raven hue of those locks once so thickly clustered about his temples. There is a consciousness of wealth and prosperity, and of rural consequence, in his general aspect and deportment; but if he loves the good things of this world, and prides himself in possessing them, there is nothing in the expression of his countenance that bespeaks a selfish and narrow heart, or a covetous disposition. He looks willing to distribute of his abundance; and greetings of cordial good will, on both sides, are exchanged between the farmer and such of his labourers as fall into the same path in their way to the church. Arm-in-arm with her spouse marches his portly help-mate, fat, florid, and, like himself, "redolent" of the good things of this world, corn, and wine, and oil, that sustaineth the heart of man, and maketh him of a cheerful countenance.

A comely and a stately dame is the lady of Farmer Buckwheat, when, as now, she paces by his side, resplendent in her Sunday-going garb of ample and substantial materials, and all of the very best that can be bought for money. One can calculate the profits of the dairy and the bee-hives, the pin-money of the farmer's lady—not to mention his weightier accumulations—by the richness of that black satin cloak and bonnet, full trimmed with real lace, and by the multitudinous plaits of that respectable-looking snuff-coloured silk gown and coat.

It is true her old fashioned prejudices would have been in favour of a large double silk handkerchief, pinned neatly down, and a flowered chintz gown, drawn up through the

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pocket-holes over a white quilted petticoat; but the worthy dame has two fair daughters, and they have been brought up at a boarding-school; and they have half-coaxed, half-teased their Ma'a out of such antiquated vulgar tastes, though even those pertinacious reformists have been obliged to concede the point of a pelisse in favour of a satin cloak. But when they have conceded one point, they have gained at least two. See the old lady's short sleeves, neatly frilled just below the elbow, are elongated down to the wrists, and finished there by a fashionable cuff, out of which protrudes the red, fat, fubsy hand, with short dumpy fingers webbed between, broad, and turning up at the tips, looking as if they had been created on purpose to knead dough, press curds, and pat up butter; and lo! on the forefinger of the right hand a great garnet ring set in silver, massy enough for the edge of a soup tureen. It is an heirloom from some great-grandmother, who was somehow related to somebody who was first cousin to a "*Barrow-knight*," and was herself so very rich a lady—and so the misses have rummaged it out, and forced it down upon their Ma'a's poor dear fat finger, which sticks out as stiffly from the sensation of that unwonted compression, as if it were tied up and poulticed for a whitlow; and the poor lady, in spite of all hints and remonstrances, will walk with her gloves dangling *in* her hands, instead of *on* them; and, altogether, the short pillowy arms cased up in those tight cerements, with both the hands and all the fingers spread out as if in act to swim, look, for all the world, like the fins of a turtle, or the flaps of a frightened gosling. Poor worthy dame! but a sense of conscious grandeur supports her under the infliction of this fashionable penance. And then come the Misses Buckwheat, mincing delicately in the wake of their Pa'a and Ma'a, with artificial flowers in their Leghorn bonnets, sky-blue spencers, fawn-coloured boots, flounces up to their knees, a pink parasol in one hand, and a pocket-handkerchief dangling from the other; not neatly folded and carried with the handsome prayer-book, in the pretty fashion that so well becomes that fair modest girl, their neighbour's daughter, whose profound ignorance of fashionable

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dress and manners is looked on as quite pitiable, "poor thing!" by the Misses Buckwheat. For what are *they* intended, I wonder! For farmers' wives? To strain milk, churn butter, fat pigs, feed poultry, weigh out cheeses, and cure bacon hogs? Good-lack! They paint landscapes! and play on the piano! and dance quadrilles! and make bead-purses! and keep albums! and doat on Moore's Melodies and Lord Byron's Poems! They are to be "tutoresses," or companions, or—something or other *very genteel* —*ladies*, for certain, any way. So they have settled themselves, and so the weak doating mother fondly anticipates, though the father talks as yet only of their prosperous establishment, (all classes talk of establishing young ladies now,) as the wives of wealthy graziers, or substantial yeomen, or farmers, or thriving tradesmen. But he drinks his port wine, and follows the hounds. And then, bringing up the rear of the family procession, lounges on its future representative, its sole son and heir. And he is a smart buck, far too genteel to walk arm-in-arm with his sisters; so he saunters behind, cutting off the innocent heads of the dangling brier-roses, and the tender hazel-shoots, with that little jemmy switch, wherewith ever and anon he flaps the long-looped sides of his yellow-topped boots; and his white hat is set knowingly on one side, and he wears a coloured silk handkerchief knotted closely round his throat, and fastened down to the shirt bosom by a shining brooch—and waistcoat of three colours, pink, blue, and buff—a grass green coat, with black velvet collar—and on his little finger (the wash leather glove is off on that hand) a Belcher ring as thick as the coil of a ship's cable. Well done, young Hopeful! That was a clever aim! There goes a whole shower of hazel-tops. What a pity your shearing ingenuity is not as active among the thistles in your father's fields. The family has reached the church-gate—they are entering now—and the farmer, as he passes through, vouchsafes a patronising nod, and a good-humoured word or two to that poor widow and her daughter who stand aside holding the gate open for him, and dropping humble curtsies to every member of the family. The farmer gives them now

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and then a few days' work—hoeing, weeding, or stoning, or at hay and harvest time, on his broad acres; but his daughters wonder "Pa'a should demean himself so far as to nod familiarly to such poor objects." *They* draw up their chins, flirt their handkerchiefs, and pass on as stiff as pokers. And last, in straggles Master Timothy.—(He hates that name, by-the-by, and wishes his sponsors had favoured him with one that might have shortened buckishly into Frank or Tom, or—*Tim* won't do, and his sisters scout the barbarous appellation, and have re-christened him "Alonzo." They would fain have bestowed on him the name of Madame Cotton's interesting Saracen, Malek Adhel, but it was impossible to teach their mamma the proper pronunciation of that word, which she persisted in calling "Molly Coddle") —In straggles Timothy Alonzo, but he is even more condescending than his papa, and bestows a very tenderly expressive glance at the widow's daughter as she drops her eyes, with her last and lowest curtsy to him.

Well, they are gone by, thank Heaven! and the poor woman and her child follow at humble distance to their Master's house. They will not always be abased there. The widow Maythorn and her daughter Rachel are a very poor, but a very happy pair. Her daughter is sickly and delicate; and folks say, in our country phrase, "hardly so sharp as she should be;" but she has sense enough to be a dutiful child—to suffer meekly—to hope humbly—to believe steadfastly. What profiteth other knowledge? The mother and daughter possess a little cottage, a bit of garden, and a cow that picks its scanty pasture on the waste. They work hard—they want often—but they contrive to live, and are content. The widow Maythorn and her daughter are a happy pair!

Yonder, winding slowly up that shady green lane, come the inmates of the parish workhouse—the in-door poor. First, the master, a respectable-looking middle-aged man, with somewhat of pompous sternness in his deportment; but there is nothing hard or cruel in the expression of his eye, as ever and anon he looks back along the line of paupers, of all ages and sexes, so decently marshalled under

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his command. On the contrary, he hangs back to speak a few words of hearty encouragement to that very old man who totters along so feebly on his crutches, under the burden of his fourscore years of toil and trouble, and the increasing load of his bodily infirmities. And the grateful look of old Matthew, and his cheerful "Lord love ye, master!" are elegant vouchers that, for once, the man "armed with a little brief authority" abuseth not his trust. The mistress has less dignity, but more severity of aspect, as her sharp, quick glance runs back, often and suspiciously, along the line of females; and she calls them peremptorily to order if their voices are heard too voluble; and she rebukes the straggling children, and denounces exemplary vengeance against those two detected urchins in particular—detected in the misdemeanour of skulking behind to pull those tempting clusters of almost ripe nuts that peep so invitingly from the high hazel hedge. But her denunciations are not listened to, it should appear, with any very vehement demonstrations of dread. I believe, o' my conscience, "her bark is waur than her bite;" and that half her terrors lie in that long bowsprit nose, that looks as if it were sharpened to a point by the cross fire of those little red gimlet eyes, and in the sound of a voice shrill, cracked, and squeaking, like the tone of a penny trumpet. Very neat, decent, and respectable is the appearance of the long line of parish poor. They are all comfortably clad in whole and clean apparel; and even that poor idiot who brings up the rear, straggling in and out of the file of children—(who can restrain his vagaries?)—Even he is clothed in good grey woollen, and a whole new hat, in lieu of the scarlet tatters, and old battered soldier's helmet, with its ragged red and white feather, in which he delights to decorate his poor little deformed figure on week-days, calling himself corporal, captain, general, or drum-major, as the whim of the moment rules his wayward fancy—each grade, as he assumes it, the most honourable in his estimation. They are gone by, all of them—men, women, and children—the two culprits still lagging in the rear. I wager they have another pluck at the forbidden fruit on their way back to the workhouse.

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More children still!—marshalled in double files! Boys and girls, three scores at least; each sex uniformly clad; the master and mistress leading the van of their respective divisions. That is the subscription charity-school, and the children have just donned their new clothing; and do but see, poor urchins! what hogs in armour some of them look like! Good clothing it is—warm and decent, and of durable material; thick grey frieze for the boys, with dark blue worsted hose, and black beaver hats—*black* hats, at least: and for the girls, grogram gowns, and wild-boar petticoats; (reader, did you ever hear of such materials?) and stiff enough they are, Heaven knows; and as the things are all sent down ready-made from a London warehouse, they are of necessity pretty much of the same size, as having the better chance to *fit*, or, at all events, to *do* for all. So you shall see a poor little boy muffled up in a coat that looks like his grandfather's great-coat, the flaps of which dangle almost to the ground; the collar is turned half-way down his back, or it would mount up so high as to bury his head, which is indeed already buried under a hat, the brim of which rests upon his shoulders and the bridge of his nose; and when he hangs down his arms, you cannot see so much as the tip of his fingers peeping from within those long enormous sleeves. To complete the picture of comfort, he skuffs along in a pair of shoes, the stiff upper leathers of which reach up to the middle of his shins, and the poor little legs stick in them like two chumpers in a couple of butter churns. Altogether, he looks like a dangling scarecrow set up in a corn-field.

But, then, the little muffled man presents a fine contrast to his alongside mate. *His* long-tailed coat makes him a short jacket. His arms are squeezed through the sleeves to-be-sure, but then they stick out like wooden pins on either side, with excessive tightness; and there, see! dangles half-a-yard of red lean wrist, and all the blood in his body seems forced down into those great, blue, bony knuckles. It was a good hearty thump, certes, that jammed down that stiff skimming-dish of a hat, even to where it now reaches on his unlucky pate. The great, flat, *un-*

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hemmed red ears stick out from under it like two red-cabbage leaves; and for his shoes!—the blacksmith would have shod him better, and have inflicted less pain in the operation; for, see! his feet are doubled up in them, into the form of hoofs, and he hobbles along, poor knave! like a cat in pattens, or as if the smooth green lane were paved with red-hot flints. And the girls are not much better off. Some draggle long trains after them, and have waists down to their hips; others are wellnigh kilted; and that long lanky girl there, Jenny Andrews, would reveal far more than a decent proportion of those *heron* legs of hers, were it not that she has ingeniously contrived to tie the wild-boar petticoat a reef below the grogram gown, thereby supplying the deficiencies of the latter.—Well, they are all new clothed, however, spick and span, and all very proud of being so,—even he of the crumpt-up toes, who will soon poke his way through those leathern fetters, and in the mean time limps along in contented misery. "New clothes!" thinks he.—"Good clothes! handsome clothes!" thinks Madam Buckwheat.—"Fine clothes! fashionable clothes!" think the Misses Buckwheat.—"Brave clothes! pretty clothes!" thinks the poor idiot, when Monday comes, and he is allowed to resume his old scarlet tatters. All are puffed up with the self-same species of conceit, variously modified, and so are many greater and many finer folks than they—ay, and many wiser ones too—many more talented. Witness Goldsmith, in his peach-blossom coat; and Johnson, (who ridiculed the poor poet's puerile vanity,) in his gala suit of fine brown broad-cloth. One spread his tail like a peacock, and strutted about to show off its gaudy colours; the other, arrayed like the bird of wisdom, in grave and sombre plumage, was equally proud of the dignity it conferred, and oraculously opined that a gentleman was twice a gentleman in a full dress suit. Vanity! vanity! thou universal leaven! from what human heart art thou absolutely excluded?

Hark! the trampling of horses, and the sound of wheels. The Squire's carriage sweeps round the corner of the churchyard. He and his family arrive thus early, that the

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horses may be stabled in that long low shed, appropriated for the purpose, and the servants ready to enter the church at the same time with their master, and to partake with him of the benefit and comfort of the confession and absolution. Some people seem to consider those parts of the service as a mere prelude—a sort of overture, as hackneyed, and about as solemn, as that to Lodoiska; and if they reach their pews by the time they are half over, it is well. As for the servants, what can it signify to them?—There alights another carriage load—and another—and another—and the comers in a car, and in two tax-carts, and on sundry steeds; and there the patrician party is congregating together round the great east door; and there stands the clerk, with hat in hand, peering down the vicarage lane, under the penthouse of his other shading hand, for the first glimpse of the minister. Now, he descries the white face of the old roan mare. Another look, to-be-sure;—it is indeed that sober-footed palfrey, bearing her reverend burden. And then he turns hastily into the belfry; and immediately the cracked chimes subside into a few quick single strokes, announcing the near approach of the clergyman, and the speedy commencement of divine service. That fine ruddy lad, with the white smock-frock, has been immovably posted at the churchyard wicket for the last half-hour. His patience will accomplish its purpose. He is the first to start forward—hat in hand, and smoothing down his glossy yellow hair—to receive the bridle of the old man, which the vicar resigns into the hand of careful Will, with the usual charges, and a smile, and a few words of kind notice.

The minister has passed into the vestry; the clerk has followed him. A few more strokes and the bell ceases; a few more seconds and the churchyard is left to its lonely silence, and to its quiet occupants; and the living are gathered together, within those sacred walls, to hear the words of eternal life, on the surety whereof, the sleepers without—with whom they must one day lie down in the dust—have been committed to their narrow beds, "in sure and certain hope."

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But my discourse purported to be of Churchyards only, and I have rambled from my text. No matter; I am come, as we all must, to the churchyard at last, and my next chapter shall be of "graves, and stones, and epitaphs."

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CHAPTER IV.

My next chapter, I think, was to be of "graves, and stones, and epitaphs." Come, then, to the churchyard with me, whoever shrinketh not from thoughtful inspection of those eloquent sermon books. Come to that same churchyard where lately we saw the assembled congregation—the aged and the young—the proud and the lowly—the rich and poor collecting together on the Sabbath morning to worship their Creator within those sacred walls. Many months since then have slipped away; the green leaves have withered, and dropped, and decayed, and the bare branches have been hung with icicles, and bent down under the weight of winter snows; and again they have budded and put forth their tender shoots, and the thick foliage of summer has cast its broad shadow on the dark green sod; and again "decay's effacing fingers" are at work, and the yellow tints of autumn are gaining on the rich verdure of summer. And man! —the ephemeron! who perisheth as the flower of the field —whose time on earth is like the shadow that departeth— how hath it fared with him during the revolving seasons? How many have gone to their long home, and their place on earth knoweth them no more! How many of those who, when last we looked upon this scene, stood here among their friends and neighbours, full of life and health, and the anticipation of long years to come, full of schemes, and hopes, and expectations, and restless thoughts, and cumbersome cares, and troubles, and pleasures of this life! How many of these are since returned to this spot!—Yea —but to tarry here—to occupy the house appointed for all living—to lie down and sleep, and take their rest, undisturbed by winter winds or summer storms, unawakened by the chime of the church-bells when they summon hither the Sabbath congregation, or by the voices of those they loved

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in life, who pass by their lowly graves, already, perhaps, forgetful of "the form beloved," so recently deposited there!

> "So music past is obsolete—
> And yet 'twas sweet! 'twas passing sweet!
> But now 'tis gone away."

This is again a Sabbath-day—the evening of an autumnal Sabbath; morning and afternoon divine service has been performed within those walls, and now Nature is offering up her own pure homage. The hymns of her winged choristers—the incense of her flowery censer—the flames of her great altar, that glorious setting sun. See! how his departing beams steal athwart the churchyard between those old oaks, whose stately trunks, half defined in the blackness of their own shadow, half gilded by the passing brightness, prop that broad canopy of "many twinkling leaves" now glittering underneath with amber light; while above, the dense mass of foliage, towering in heavy grandeur, stands out in bold and bleak relief against the golden glory of the western horizon. How magnificent that antique colonnade! How grand that massy superstructure! Lo! the work of the great Architect, which might well put to shame the puny efforts of his creatures and the frail structures they erect to his glory, were it not that He whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, hath vouchsafed to promise, that where a few faithful hearts are gathered together to worship him in spirit and in truth, He will be there in the midst of them, even in their perishable temples. Therefore, though yon majestic oaks overtop with their proud shadow the low walls, and even the ivied tower of that rustic church, yet are they but a fitting portico, an "outer porch," to the sanctuary more especially hallowed by his presence. Neither is their spreading arch too magnificent a canopy for those obscure graves so peacefully ranged beneath it. Many a sincere and humble Christian rests from his labours beneath those green hillocks. Many a faithful believer, who has drunk without a murmur his earthly cup of bitterness, because it was awarded to him by the divine will, and

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because, trusting in the merits of his Redeemer, he cast down his burden at his feet, looking forward through his promises to be a partaker of the glory which shall be revealed hereafter. Many a one, "to fortune and to fame unknown," who walked thus humbly with his God, sleeps unrecorded in the majestic shadow of those venerable trees. But when those giants of the earth shall have stood their appointed season —shall have lived their life of centuries—them also the unsparing hand shall smite, and they too shall lie prostrate in the dust, and for their sapless trunks there shall be no renovation; while the human grain, now hidden beneath their roots, retains, even in corruption, the principles of immortality, and shall, in the fulness of time, spring up to life eternal.

What histories—not of great actions, or of proud fortunes, or of splendid attainments, but of the human heart—that inexhaustible volume!—might be told over these graves, by one who should have known their quiet tenants, and been a keen and feeling observer of their infinitely varying natures! nay, by one who should relate, from his own remembrance, even the more obvious circumstances of their obscure lives! What tales of love, and hope, and disappointment, and struggling care, and unmerited contumely and uncomplaining patience, and untold suffering, and broken hearts, might be extracted from this cold earth we tread on! What heartwrung tears have been showered down upon these quiet graves! What groans, and sighs, and sobs of uncontrollable grief, have burst out in this spot from the bosoms of those who have stood even here, on the brink of the fresh-opened grave, while the coffin was lowered into it, and the grating cords were withdrawn, and the first spadeful of earth rattled on the lid, and the solemn words were uttered—"Dust to dust!" And where are those mourners now, and how doth it fare with them?—Here! they are here! And it fareth well with them, for their troubles are over, and they sleep in peace amongst their friends and kindred; and *other* mourners have wept beside *their* graves, and those in turn shall be brought back here, to mingle their dust with that of foregone generations.

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Even the living multitude assembled here this day twelvemonths, how many, in the short interval between that and the present time, have taken up their rest within these consecrated precincts! And already, over the graves of many, the green sods have again united in velvet smoothness. Here, beside that of William Moss, in a fresher and higher hillock, to which his headstone likewise serves for a memorial; and underneath his name, there are engraven on it—yes—two other names. The aged parents and the blooming son at last repose together; and what matters now that the former went down to the grave by the slow and gradual descent of good old age, and that the latter was cut off in the prime and vigour of his manhood? If each performed faithfully the task allotted to him, then was his time on earth sufficient; and, after the brief separation of a few years, they are reunited in eternity. But here—behold a magnificent contrast to that poor plain stone! Here stands a fine tall free-stone, the top of which is ornamented in basso-relievo, with a squat white urn swaddled up in ponderous drapery, over which droops a gilt weeping willow; it looks like a sprig of samphire, the whole set off by a blue ground, encircled by a couple of goose-wings. Oh! no—I cry the sculptor mercy—they are the pinions of a pair of cherubim. There are the little trumpeters' cheeks puffing out from under them; and the obituary is engraven on a black ground in grand gold letters; and it records—Ah! Madam Buckwheat—is it come to this? Is all that majesty of port laid low? That fair exuberance of well-fed flesh? That broad expanse of comely red and white, "by Nature's sweet and cunning hand laid on." Doth all this mingle with the common earth? That goodly person clad in rustling silks! is it shrunken within the scanty folds of the shroud, and the narrow limits of a cold brick grave! What! in the very flush of worldly prosperity—when the farmer's granaries were overflowing with all manner of store—when your dairy had yielded double produce—when the stock of cheeses was unprecedented—when your favourite Norman had presented you with twin calves—when you had reared three broods of milkwhite turkeys, and the China sow had littered

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thirteen pigs!—just as the brindled heifer of that famous cross was coming into milk—and just as the new barn was built, and the parish rates were lowered, and the mulberry-tree was beginning to bear—and just as you had brought yourself to feel at home in your long sleeves, and unfettered by the great garnet ring, and to wear gloves when you were out visiting; and, to crown all, just as your youngest hope—your favourite daughter—had made a splendid conquest of a real gentleman—one who had come down from Lunnon in his own shay, and talked about "Hastley's," and "the Hoppera," and "Wauxhall," and the "Vild Beasts," and "Vaterloo Bridge," and all them there things, and was to install Betsey (the old lady always forgot to say Eliza) lady and mistress of a beautiful "ouse" in Fleet Street. Oh! at such a time to be torn from "Life and all the joys it yields!" Ah, Madam Buckwheat! is it so indeed? Alas! too true—

> "A heap of dust is all remains of thee,
> 'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be."

Take care!—never tread upon a grave—What! you saw it not, that scarce distinguishable hillock, overshadowed by its elevated neighbour? It is, however, recently thrown up, but hastily and carelessly, and has of late been trodden down almost to a surface, by the workmen employed in erecting that gilded "tribute of affection" to the memory of the farmer's deceased spouse. A few more weeks and it will be quite level with the even sod, and the village children will gambol over it unmindful of their old friend, whom yet they followed to that grave with innocent regretful tears, the only tears that were shed for the poor outcast of reason. The parish pauper sleeps in that grave—the workhouse idiot. He for whom no heart was tenderly interested; for he had long, long outlived the poor parents to whom their only child, their harmless Johnny, (for they thought him not an idiot,) was an object of the fondest affection. There were none to take to him when they were gone, so the workhouse afforded him refuge, and sustenance,

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and humane treatment; and his long life—for it was extended nearly to the term of seventy years—was not, on the whole, joyless or forsaken. His intellect was darkened and distorted; but not so as to render him an object of disgust or terror, or to incapacitate him from performing many tasks of trifling utility. He even exercised a sort of rude ingenuity in many little rustic handicrafts. He wove rush baskets and mats, and neatly and strongly wove them; and of the refuse straw he plaited coarse hats, such as are worn by ploughboys; and he could make wicker cages for blackbirds and magpies, and mouse-traps, and rabbit-hutches; and he had a pretty notion of knitting too, only that he could never be brought to sit still long enough to make any great proficiency in that way. But he was useful, besides, in many offices of household drudgery; and though his kind master never suffered poor Johnny to be "put upon," he had many employers, and, as far as his simple wits enabled him to comprehend their several wills, he was content to fulfil them. So he was sent to fetch water, and to watch that the coppers did not boil over, and to feed the fire, and blow the bellows, and sift the cinders, and to scrape carrots and potatoes, and to shell beans, and to sweep the floor, (but then he would always waste time in making waves and zigzags on the sand,) and to rock the cradles; and *that* office he seemed to take peculiar delight in, and would even pretend to hush the babies, as he had seen practised by their mothers, with a sort of droning hum which he called singing. But besides all these, and other tasks innumerable, more extended trust was committed to him, and he was never known but to discharge it faithfully. He was allowed (in exception of those rules of the house imperative on its sane inmates) to wander out whole days, having the charge of a few cows or pigs, and for a trifling remuneration, which he brought regularly home to his master, who expended it for him with judicious kindness, in the purchase of such simple luxuries as the poor idiot delighted in—a little snuff and tobacco, or the occasional treat of a little coarse tea and brown sugar.

Then was old Johnny in his glory, when, seated on some

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sunny roadside bank, or nestling among the fern leaves in some bosky dingle, within ken of his horned or grunting charge, of which he never lost sight, he had collected about him a little cluster of idle urchins, with whom he would vie in dexterity in threading daisy necklaces, or sticking the little white flowers on a leafless thorn branch, or in tying up cowslip balls, or in making whistles, or arrow-heads of hollow elder stalks; or in weaving high conical caps of green rushes; and then was Cæsar in his element, for then would he arm with those proud helmets the heads of his childish mates, and marshal them (nothing loath) in military order, each shouldering a stick, his supposed musket; and, flourishing his wooden sword, and taking the command of his new levies, he marched up and down before the line of ragged rogues, gobbling like a turkey-cock, with swelling pride, in all the martial magnificence of his old cocked-hat and feathers, and of his scarlet tatters with their tarnished lace.

But sometimes was he suddenly cast down from that pinnacle of earthly grandeur by the malicious wantonness of an unlucky boy, who would slyly breathe out a few notes from an old flute, well anticipating their effect on poor Johnny. Rude as were those notes, they "entered into his soul." In a moment his proud step was arrested; his authoritative, uplifted hand fell nerveless by his side; his erect head dropped, and large tears rolled down his aged face; and at last sobs—deep, heavy, convulsive sobs!—burst from the bosom of the poor idiot, and then even his mischievous tormentor almost wept to see the pain he had inflicted. Yes, such was the power of music, of its rudest, simplest tones, over some spring of sensibility, deep hidden in the benighted soul of that harmless creature; and he had apparently no control over the tempestuous ebullition of its excited vehemence, except at church during the time of divine service.

There, while the psalm was being sung, he was still, and profoundly silent. But when others rose up from the form beside him, he sunk still lower in his sitting posture, and cowering down, bent forward his head upon his knees,

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hiding his face there within the fold of his crossed arms, and no sound or sob escaped him, but his poor frame trembled universally; and when the singing was over, and he looked up again, the thin grey hair on his wrinkled forehead was wet with perspiration. *Now*, let the clarion sound, or the sweet hautboy pour out its melodious fulness, or the thrilling flute discourse, or the solemn organ roll over his grave its deep and mighty volume, and he will sleep on undisturbed —ay, till the call of the last trumpet shall awaken him, and the mystery of his earthly existence shall be unfolded, and the soul, emerging from its long eclipse, shall shine out in the light of immortality. At that day of solemn reckoning, how many, whose brilliant talents and luminous intellect have blazed out with meteoric splendour not to enlighten, but to dazzle and mislead, and bewilder the minds of their fellow-mortals in the mazes of inextricable error—how many of those who have so miserably abused the great trust reposed in them, shall be fain to exchange places with that unoffending innocent, crying out, in the agony of their despair, "to the mountains, fall on us, and to the hills, cover us!"

Farewell, old Johnny—quiet be thy rest!—harmless and lowly was thy life!—peaceful and unnoticed thy departure!

Few had marked the gradual decline of the poor creature; but for many months he had wasted away, and his feeble, deformed frame had bowed nearer and nearer to the earth; and he cared little for any nourishment, except his favourite regale of tea, and the mistress's occasional bounty —a slice of white bread and butter; and there was less willingness to exert himself than formerly. He still crept about his accustomed tasks, but slowly and silently, and would sometimes fall asleep over his more sedentary employment; and when spoken to, he seldom replied but by a nod and a smile—that peculiar smile of idiotic intelligence. Some said the old man grew lazy and sullen, "for what could ail him?" they wondered. Nothing—nothing ailed him—nothing to signify—only the cold hand of death was on him, and he dropped at last with the leaves in autumn. One evening, long after milking-time, the cows he had

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been intrusted to watch came straggling home without their keeper. Search was made for him, and he was soon discovered by the children, who were well acquainted with his favourite haunts and hiding-places.

They found him gathered up in his usual form, among the dry fern leaves, at the foot of an old hawthorn, near which ran a reedy streamlet. His back rested against the hawthorn's twisted stem, his old grey head was bare, and a few withered leaves had dropped upon it. Beside him lay a half-finished cap of woven rushes; one hand was on it, and the other still grasped the loose materials of his simple fabric. There was a smile upon his countenance, (he was always smiling to himself,) but his head had dropped down on his bosom, and his eyes were closed as if in sleep. He was dead—quite cold and stiff; so they took him from his pleasant fern bank to his late home, the workhouse, and the next day he was screwed down in the shell of rough boards, the last allowance of parish bounty, and before sunset those green sods were trampled down over the pauper's grave.—Farewell, old Johnny!

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CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE longer, yet a little longer, let us tarry in this secluded burial-ground. The sun's golden rim touches not yet the line of that bright horizon. Not yet have the small birds betaken themselves to their leafy homes, nor the bees to their hives, nor the wild rabbits to their burrows on the heath. Not yet, sailing like a soft fleecy cloud through the grey depths of twilight, hath the light-shunning owl ventured abroad on her wide winnowing vans, nor is the bat come forth, cleaving the dewy air with his eccentric circles. Tarry a little longer, even till the moon, that pale, dull, silvery orb, shines out un-eclipsed by the glories of her effulgent brother. Then will her tender light, glancing in between those ancient oaks, sleep sweetly on the green graves, and partially illumine that south-east angle of the Church Tower, and those two long narrow windows. And then will our walk homeward be delightful—far more so than even in the warm glow of sunset; for then every bank and hedge-row will be glittering with dew in the pale silvery light, and every fern leaf will be a diamond spray, and every blade of grass a crystal spear; and sparks of living fire will tremble on them, and glance out with their emerald rays from between the broad leaves of the coltsfoot and the arum. And then the wild honeysuckles (our hedge-rows are full of them) will exhale such sweets as I would not exchange for all the odours of the gardens of Damascus; or if we go home by the heath-track, the wild thyme, and the widows'-wail, will enrich the air with their aromatic fragrance. On such a night as this will be, I never unreluctantly re-enter the formal dwellings of man, or resign myself to oblivious slumbers. Methinks how exquisite it would be, to revel, like a creature of the elements, the long night through in the broad flood of moonshine! To pass

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from spaee to space with the fleetness of thought, " putting a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes," or to skim silently along on the stealthy moonbeams, to lonely places, where wells of water gush up in secret, where the wild deer come fearlessly to drink, where the halcyon rears her young, and the water-lily floats like a fairy ship, unseen by human eye—and so, admitted to nature's sanctuary, blending as it were in essence with its pervading soul of rapturous repose—to be abstracted for a while from dull realities, the thoughts and cares of earth that clog the inextinguishable spirit with their dense vapours, and intercept its higher aspirations. What living soul, conscious of its divine origin, and of its immortal destination, but must at times feel weary of this probationary state, impatient of the conditions of its human nature, and of bondage in its earthly tabernacle! What living soul, that has proved the vanity of all sublunary things, but has at times aspirated with the royal Psalmist, " Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest!"

Hark! there's a stir near us—a stir of footsteps and of human voices. It proceeds from within the church; and see! the porch doors are ajar, and also that low-arched doorway opening into the belfry. Those steps are ascending its dark, narrow stair; and then, hark again! from within, a low, dull, creaking sound; and then one long, deep, startling toll—another, ere the echoes of the first have died away over the distant woods. That sound is the summons of the grave. Some neighbouring peasant is borne to-night to his long home; and, see! as we turn this angle of the church, there, beside that broad old maple, is a fresh-opened grave. The dark cavity is covered in by two boards laid loosely over—but it will not be long untenanted. Let us look abroad for the approaching funeral, for, by the tolling of the bell, it must be already within sight. It comes not up that shady lane—no, nor by the broad heath road, from the further hamlet—nor from the direction of the Grange farm—but there—ah! there it is, and close at hand, emerging from that little shrubby hollow, through which the road dips to the near village of Downe. Is it not

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a beautiful thing to gaze on, in this lovely secluded spot, by the light of that yellow sunset, the mellow hue of which falls with such a rich yet tempered brightness on the white draperies of those foremost in the procession?

It is a maiden's funeral—that, probably, of some young person; for, see! the pall is borne by six girls, each shrouded like a nun in her long white flowing hood, and in lieu of the black pall, a white sheet is flung over the coffin. The lower classes are very tenacious of those distinctive observances; and many a young creature I have known, whose delight it seemed, during the last stages of some lingering malady, to arrange every thing for her own burial—the fashion of her shroud, and the flowers they should strew over her in the coffin—the friends who should follow her to the grave, and the six of her young companions to be selected for her pall-bearers. Almost the very poorest contrive, on such occasions, what they call "a creditable burying"—even to the coarse refreshments distributed amongst the funeral guests. Poor souls! long and sorely do they pinch for it, in their own few comforts, and in their scanty meals; but the self-inflicted privation is unrepiningly endured, and who would take upon him, if it were possible, to restrain that holy and natural impulse to honour the memory of the dead? See! the train lengthens into sight as it winds up the ascent from that wild dingle. The bearers and their insensible burden are already near, and there follow the female mourners foremost. Ah! I know now for whom that bell tolls—for whom that grave is prepared—whose remains are there borne along to their last resting-place. Close behind the coffin comes a solitary mourner—solitary in her grief—and yet she bears in her arms a helpless innocent, whose loss is even more deplorable than hers. That poor old woman is the widowed mother of Rachel Maythorne, whose corpse she is following to the grave; and that unconscious baby who stretches out its little hands with laughing glee towards the white drapery of the coffin, is the desolate orphan of her only child—alas! of its unwedded mother.

A dark and foul offence lies at his door who seduced that

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simple creature from the paths of innocence! A few words will tell her story; but let us stop till the funeral-train has passed on into the church, from which the minister now advances to meet it. That poor childless mother! with what rapid strides have age and infirmities overtaken her, since we saw her this time twelvemonth holding open that very gate for the farmer's prosperous family, and following them into church with contented humility, accompanied by her duteous Rachel. Then she was still a comely matron, looking cheerful in her poverty, and strong to labour. Now, how bent down with age and feebleness does that poor frame appear! The burden of the little infant is one she can ill sustain, but to whom would she resign the precious charge? She has contrived a black frock for the little creature—probably from her old gown—her widow's gown—for she herself has on no mourning garment; only an old rusty black willow bonnet, with a little crape about it of still browner hue, and a large black cotton shawl, with which she has covered over, as nearly as possible, that dark linen gown. She holds up no handkerchief to her eyes with the idle parade of ceremonial woe; but her face is bent down over the baby's bosom, and drops are glistening there, and on its soft cheek, that never fell from those young, joyous eyes.

A few neighbours follow her—a few poor women—two and two, who have all contrived to make some show of decent mourning; and those three or four labouring men who walk last, have each a crape hat-band that has served for many funerals. They are all gone by now, the dead and the living. For the last time on earth the departed mortal has entered the House of God. While that part of the burial-service appointed to be read there is proceeding, a few words will tell her story.

Rachel Maythorne was the only child of her mother, and she was a widow, left early to struggle with extreme poverty, and with the burden of a sickly infant, afflicted with epileptic fits, almost from its birth. The neighbours, many of them, said, "It would be a mercy, if so be God Almighty were pleased to take away the poor baby; she would never

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thrive, or live to be a woman, and was a terrible hindrance to the industrious mother." But *she* thought not so, neither would she have exchanged her puny wailing infant, for the healthiest and the loveliest in the land :—she thought it the loveliest, ay, the most intelligent too, though every body else saw well enough that it was more backward in every thing than almost any child of the same age. But it did weather out the precarious season of infancy, and did live to be a woman, and even to enjoy a moderate share of health, though the fits were never wholly subdued, and they undoubtedly had weakened and impaired, though not destroyed her intellect. Most people at first sight would have called Rachel a plain girl, and she was, in truth, far from pretty, slight and thin in her person, and, from the feebleness of her frame, stooping almost like a woman in years. Her complexion, which might have been fair and delicate, had she been a lady and luxuriously reared up, was naturally pallid ; and exposure to sun and wind, in her out-door labours, had thickened it to a dark and muddy hue ; but there was a meek and tender expression in her mild hazel eyes, and in her dimpled smile, and in the tone of her low quiet voice, even in the slight hesitation which impeded her utterance, that never failed to excite interest, when once they had attracted observation. The mother and daughter lived a life of contented poverty ; the former, strong and healthful, found frequent employment as a charwoman, or in going out to wash, or in field labour ; the latter, brought up almost delicately, though the child of indigence, and still occasionally subject to distressing fits, was principally occupied at home, in the care of their cow, the management of the little dairy, in the cultivation of their small patch of garden, (and small though it was, Rachel had her flower-knot in a sunny corner,) and in knitting and coarse needle-work. In summer, however, she shared her mother's task in the hay-field, in mushroom-picking, and in the pleasant labour of the gleaners ; and how sweet was the frugal meal of that contented pair, when the burden of the day was over, and they sat just within the open door of

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their little cottage, over which a luxuriant jessamine had wreathed itself into a natural porch.

If Nature had been niggardly in storing the simple head of poor Rachel, she had been but too prodigal of feeling to a heart which overflowed with the milk of human kindness, whose capacity of loving seemed boundless, embracing within its scope every created thing that breathed the breath of life. We hear fine ladies and sentimental misses making a prodigious fuss about sensibility, and barbarity, and "the poor beetle that we tread upon;" but I do firmly believe simple Rachel, without even thinking of her feelings, much less saying a word about them, would have gone many steps out of her way rather than set her foot upon a worm. It was a sore trouble to her, her annual misery, when Daisey's calf, that she had patted so fondly, was consigned to the butcher's cart, and while the poor mother lowed disconsolately about in quest of her lost little one, there was no peace for Rachel. Every moan went to her heart. But her love, and pity, and kindness of nature, were not all expended (as are some folks' sensibilities) on birds, and beasts, and black beetles. Her poor services were at the command of all who needed them; and Rachel was in truth a welcome and a useful guest in every neighbour's cottage. She was called in to assist at the wash-tub, to take a turn at the butter-churn, to nurse the baby while the mother was more actively occupied, or to mind the house while the good woman stepped over to the shop, or to watch the sick, while others of the family were necessitated to be about the daily labour that gained their daily bread; she could even spell out a chapter of the Bible, when the sick person desired to hear its comfortable words. True, she was not always very happy in her selections. "It was *all* good;" so she generally began reading first where the book fell open, no matter if at the numbering of the twelve tribes, or at "The Song of Solomon," or the story of "Bel and the Dragon." "It was all good," said Rachel; so she read on boldly through thick and thin; and fine work, to-be-sure, she made of some of the terrible hard names. But the simple soul *was*

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right,—it *was* "all good." The intention was perfect; and the spirit in which those inapplicable portions of Scripture were almost unintelligibly read, found favour doubtless with Him who claims the service of the heart, and cares little for the outward form of sacrifice.

A child might have practised on the simplicity of Rachel Maythorne; and when April-fool day came round, on many a bootless errand was she sent, and many a marvellous belief was palmed upon her by the village urchins, who yet, in the midst of their merry mischief, would have proved sturdy champions in her cause, had real insult or injury been offered to the kind creature, from whom all their tormenting ingenuity could never provoke a more angry exclamation than the short pathetic words, "Oh dear!" One would have thought none but a child could have had the heart to abuse even in jest the credulous innocence of that unoffending creature. But the human "heart *is* desperately wicked;" and one there was, so callous and corrupt, and absorbed in its own selfishness, as to convert into "an occasion of falling," the very circumstances which should have been a wall of defence about poor Rachel.

It chanced that, towards the end of last year's harvest, the Widow Maythorne was confined to her cottage by a sprained ankle, so that, for the first time in her life, Rachel went out to the light labour of gleaning, unaccompanied by her tender parent. Through the remainder of the harvest season, she followed Farmer Buckwheat's reapers, and no gleaner returned at evening so heavily laden as the widow's daughter. For the farmer himself favoured the industry of simple Rachel, and no reaper looked sharply towards her, though she followed him so close as to glean a chance handful, even from the sheaf he was binding together. And she followed in the wake of the loaded waggons, from whose toppling treasures, as they rustled through the deep narrow lanes, the high hedges on either side took tribute; and though *her* sheaf acquired bulk more considerably than even from the golden hangings of the road side, no one rebuked the widow's daughter, or repelled her outstretched hand; and *one* there was, who gave more than passive encourage-

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ment to her humble encroachments. And when the last waggon turned into the spacious rickyard, and the gleaners retired slowly from the gate, to retrace their way homeward through the same lanes, where a few golden ears might yet be added to their goodly sheaves, then Rachel also turned towards her home, but not in company with her fellow-gleaners. For the young farmer led her by a nearer and a pleasanter way, through the Grange homestead, and the orchard, and the hazel copse, that opened just on the little common where stood her mother's cottage, the first of the scattered hamlet. But though the way was certainly shorter, and there were no stiles to clamber over, and the young farmer helped Rachel with her load, by the time they reached the little common, lights were twinkling in all its skirting cottages, and the returned gleaners were gathered round their frugal supper-boards, and the Widow Maythorne was standing in her jessamine porch, looking out for her long absent Rachel, and wondering that she lingered so late, till the sight of her heavy burden, as she emerged from the dark copse, accounted for her lagging footsteps and tardy return. Her companion never walked with her farther than the copse, and he exacted a promise———Alas! and it was given and kept, though the poor thing comprehended not why she might not make her dear mother partaker of her happy hopes; but it was *his* wish, so she promised all he exacted, and too faithfully kept silence. So time passed on. The bright broad harvest moon dwindled away to a pale crescent, and retired into the starry depths of heaven, and then, again emerging from her unseen paths, she hung out her golden lamp, to light the hunter's month. Then came the dark days and cloudy nights of November, and the candle was lit early in the widow's cottage, and the mother and daughter resumed their winter tasks of the spinning wheel and the knitting needles. And the widow's heart was cheery, for the meal-chest was full, and the potato-patch had yielded abundantly, and there stood a goodly peat-stack by the door; and, through the blessing of Providence on their careful industry, they should be fed and warmed all the long winter months; so there was gladness

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in the widow's heart. But Rachel drooped; at first unobserved by the fond parent, for the girl was ever gentle and quiet, and withal not given to much talking, or to noisy merriment; but then she would sit and sing to herself like a bird, over her work, and she was ever ready with a smiling look and a cheerful answer, when her mother spoke to, or asked a question of her. Now she was silent, but unquiet, and would start as if from sleep when spoken to, and fifty times in an hour lay by her work hastily, and walk to the door, or the window, or the little cupboard, as if for some special purpose, which yet seemed ever to slip away unaccomplished from her bewildered mind; and sometimes she would wander away from her home for an hour or more together, and from those lonely rambles she was sure to return with looks of deeper dejection, and eyes still heavy with the traces of recent tears. The mother's observation once aroused, her tender anxiety soon fathomed the cruel secret. Alas! unhappy mother—thou hadst this only treasure—this one poor lamb—who drank of thy cup, and lay in thy bosom, and was to thee a loving and a dutiful child; and the spoiler came, and broke down thy little fence of earthly comfort, and laid waste the peaceful fold of nature's sweetest charities.

The rustic libertine, whose ruthless sport, the amusement of a vacant hour, had been the seduction of poor Rachel, soon wearied of his easy conquest, and cast her "like a loathsome weed away." He found it not at first an easy task to convince her of his own baseness, and intended desertion of her; but when at last he roughly insisted on the discontinuance of her importunate claims, and the simple mind of his poor victim once fully comprehended his inhuman will, she would have obeyed it in upbraiding silence; but, alas! her injuries were not to be concealed, and it was the hard task of the afflicted mother to appeal for such miserable compensation as the parish could enforce, to support her unhappy child in the hour of trial, and to assist in maintaining the fatherless little one. Three months ago it was born into this hard, bleak world; and though the child of shame, and poverty, and abandonment, never was the heir

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of a mighty dukedom more fondly welcomed, more dotingly gazed on, more tenderly nursed, than that poor baby: and it was a lovely infant. How many a rich and childless pair would have yielded up even to the half of all their substance to be the parents of such a goodly creature! All the sorrows of the forsaken mother, all her rejected affections, all her intense capabilities of loving, became so absorbed and concentrated in her maternal feelings, that when she looked upon her child, and hugged it to her bosom, and drank in at her eyes the sweetness of its innocent smiles, it would have been difficult, perhaps, to have kept alive in her poor simple mind a repentant sorrow for her past fault, as associated with the existence of that guiltless creature. No one judged hardly of poor Rachel, though many a muttered curse, "not loud, but deep," was imprecated on her heartless seducer. *She* was still a welcome guest in every cottage—she who had ever been so ready with all her little services to every soul who needed them, was now welcome to sit with her infant in the low nursing-chair beside their humble hearths, or to lay it in the same cradle with their own little ones, while she busied herself at her task of needle-work. It was a great comfort to the anxious mother to know, that, while she was absent from her cottage, her daughter had many a friend, and many a home, to which she might resort when her own was lonely, or when the peculiar symptoms with which she was familiar warned her of an approaching fit. On such occasions (and she had generally sufficient notice) experience had taught her, that by flinging herself flat down on her face, either on the bed or floor, the attack was greatly mitigated in violence, and sometimes wholly averted; and it had been hitherto an especial mercy that the afflictive malady had never made its terrific approaches in the night season. Therefore it was, that the Widow Maythorne now and then ventured to sleep from home, when engaged in one of her various occupations, nurse-tending. So engaged, she left her cottage one evening of last week, and, not expecting to return to it before the afternoon of the ensuing day, she made it her provident request to a neighbour, that, if Rachel did not

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look in on her early in the morning, she would step across and see how it fared with her and her baby. Morning came, and the good woman was stirring early; and soon every cottage lattice was flung open, and every door unclosed, and the blue smoke curled up from every chimney but that of the Widow Maythorne's dwelling. There, door and window continued fast, and the little muslin curtain was undrawn from within the chamber window. So the friendly neighbour, mindful of her promise, stepped across to the silent cottage, and it was not without an apprehensive feeling that she lifted up the latch of the garden wicket, before which stood the old cow waiting to be disburdened of her milky treasure, and lowing out, at intervals, her uneasy impatience at the unusual tardiness of her kind mistress. Fast was the door, and fast the chamber-window, and that of the little kitchen, and cold was the hearth within, and all was still as death, and no noise answered to the repeated knocks and calls of the friendly neighbour. She tried the chamber casement, but it was fastened within, and the little curtain drawn before it precluded all view of the interior. But while the dame stood close to it, with her face glued to the glass, her ear caught an indistinct sound, and in a moment she distinguished the feeble wail of the little infant; but no mother's voice was heard tenderly hushing that plaintive murmur.

Quickly the good dame summoned the assistance of a few neighbours—the cottage door was forced open, and they passed on through the cold empty kitchen into the little bed-chamber. There stood the poor uncurtained bed, whereon the widow and her daughter had slept side by side so lovingly for so many quiet and innocent years, aud where of late the new-born babe had nestled in his mother's bosom. It was still clinging there—alas!—to a lifeless breast. The living infant was already chilled by the stiffening coldness of the dead mother, who had been, to all appearance, for many hours a corpse. The immediate cause of her death was also too probably surmised. She had evidently expired in a fit; and from the cramped posture in which she was discovered, it was also evident her

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first impulse had been to turn herself round upon her face, so to baffle the approaching crisis. But even at that fearful moment maternal love had prevailed over the powerful instinct of self-preservation—she had turned half round, but stayed herself there, painfully supported in a cramped posture by the elbow of her right arm, while the left still clasped the baby to her bosom, and had stiffened so in its last tender office.

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CHAPTER VI.

Not far from the town of ——, in ——shire, where I passed some weeks in the early part of the present summer, is the pleasant village of Halliburn, much resorted to by persons visiting the country, sojourners in the adjacent town—health-hunters, view-hunters, antiquity-hunters, felicity-hunters—*Time-killers* in short; to whom any thing serves for a lion, and as a point in view for an hour's excursion. But there are really things worth seeing in and about that same village of Halliburn, as those friends can bear witness—those dear fellow view-hunters in whose company I explored it. *They* will remember, how, after sundry and various consultations, as to *when* we should go, and *how* we should go, and at what time, and for how long; and, after consulting the Guide-book, and recalling all we had ever reported of this or that place by *such* or *such* a person—and after all talking together for an hour, and each suggesting a different plan, and one premising, on the *best* authority, that such a road was in an impassable state, and a second rejoining, from still *better* authority, that it was as smooth as a gravel-walk—and one prophesying it would rain, and the rest staking their lives that it would not rain—and some proposing to walk, and others to ride—and one voting for a car that would hold all, and another for a brace of donkey carts—the matter in debate at last resolved itself into something of a settled plan, our clashing votes subsiding like a parcel of little frothy waves into one great billow; and it was definitively agreed that we should go to Halliburn—that we should dine early, and set out early, to enjoy a fine, long summer evening in rambling about there with our books and pencils—that we should go in a car—and that we should go that very evening.

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Don't you remember all this, dear friends of mine? and how quickly we despatched our dinner, and how we packed up the pencils and sketch-books? and how James was sent off for a car, of which description of vehicle *one* of us averred there were hundreds to be hired at every corner—and how James was gone a mortal time—and how we called him all sorts of names, "loitering," and "stupid," and "blind," and what not—and how he came back at last, looking as innocent as a dove, and puffing like a grampus—and how it turned out that there were but *two* cars in the whole place, and that by superhuman exertions he had at last secured one of them—and how we flew down stairs, and found it at the door—and how it was a very odd-looking vehicle, mounted up like a tub upon stilts!—and how it cocked up so behind, we could hardly scramble in—and how, when we were in, we looked at the horse and did not like him, and then at one another, and did not like each other's looks—and how we went off at last, bang! with such a jerk as jerked us altogether in a bunch, with our eight hands up in the middle, like four pigeons in a pie—and how we tore down the street like fury, and whisked round the corner like a whirlwind—and how the beast of a horse pranced and snorted like a griffin—and how *one* of us vowed he *was* a griffin and no mortal horse—and how another of us was partly of the same opinion—and how we all hated the irregularity of his proceedings, and the jolting, and swinging, and bumping of the tub—and how at last we all attacked the driver, and insisted on getting out—and how we all blessed our stars at once more touching *terra firma*—and how we found out that we had narrowly escaped the fate of Mazeppa, having actually been tied on to the tail of a wild horse, whose proprietor had allotted to us the honor of breaking his spirit, or our own necks.

Out of evil often good proceedeth—our proud spirits were humbled. We had enough of prancing steeds and jumping chariots—we had tasted of exaltation, and were satisfied—we had been set up aloft, and were glad to come down again—so, with meek minds and amiable condescension, we intrusted ourselves, *deux à deux*, to a couple of don-

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key carts, and off we were once more!—ours, you know, Lilias, leading the way! And don't you remember—can you ever forget—that blear-eyed goblin that attended us as a running footman, shuffling along by the side of his donkey, and regaling us, *chemin faisant*, with his amiable conversation? One of his eyes, you know—the right—with its little rusty tuft of eyebrow, had wandered half-way up into his forehead; the other, leaving a long, black, shaggy eyebrow in its natural place, had dropped downhill—languishly half-closed—towards the left corner of his mouth, which lovingly twitched upwards to meet it half-way; and his nose was puckered down all on one side into the cheek by a great red and purple seam; and he was all over seamed and speckled with black, red, and purple—for the poor wretch had evidently been blown up and half-roasted some time or other, though never the worse for it when we had the first happiness of beholding him, excepting in the aforementioned trifling disarrangement of physiognomy, at which, for my part, I was so far from conceiving any manner of disgust, that I thought the countenance had more than gained in character and expression—which is every thing, you know—what it had lost in the trifling point, regularity of features. There was something infinitely piquant,—something inexpressibly wild and picturesque (quite Salvatorish) in the *tout ensemble!* The whole face had undergone a face-quake; and sparks of the volcanic flame were yet visible in the one little ferret eye, that gleamed in his forehead like a live coal as he ran on beside us, now vehemently exciting his donkey to super-donkeyish exertions—now declaiming to us, with all the fervour of a dilettante guide, on views, antiquities, curiosities, fossils, minerals, snail-shells, and Roman pavements. He was a jewel of a guide!—"take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again!"

Well, you remember we alighted—*un*lighted, as an old lady of my acquaintance used to say—at the entrance of the village; and there again debate ensued as to where we should first shape our course. There was the church—a fine old church!—to be seen, and *perhaps* sketched. There

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was a famous grotto, of which the Guide-book told wonders; and lastly, there was, within a pretty walk of the church, an old, old house, the oldest in the county, a manor-house, the property of one of the most ancient families in the kingdom—the family of the De la Veres. That venerable mansion was, I believe, the greatest attraction to us all; but, like dainty children, we set it aside for *bonne bouche*, and decided to begin with the grotto. Strange misgivings crept over us, when we were directed through the village street to the door of a mean-looking house, and told *that* was the entrance to "the cool cavern, the mysterious grot!" and when, instead of a nymph, a wood or water nymph—an Oread, a Dryad, or a Hamadryad—there came forth to greet, and introduce us to the romantic solitude, an old, frightful, painted hag, with her elf-locks bristling out in papers, like porcupine quills, from under the frills and flappets of a high French cap, and in her ears (prodigious ears they were!) two monstrous gold rings, that looked like the handles of a copper tea-urn.

We shrank back at the sight of this gorgon; but she strutted towards us with her arms a-kimbo, and there was a sinister determination in the tone in which she said to us, "Walk in, ladies, and see the grotto." *She* looked determined that we should see it, and *we* looked at her claws and her fierce eyes, and felt she was not a person to be affronted; so, as our evil stars had led us to the entrance of her den, we submitted to fate, and followed the sylvan goddess—followed her through a dark, dirty, narrow passage, out at a little mean door, into an enclosed back-yard, about forty feet square, divided into four compartments, containing a parterre, a wilderness, a castle, and *the grotto!*—and over the entrance to this Elysium was flung a wooden arch, painted sky-blue, whereon it was notified, in gold letters, that "the whole was to be seen for the inconsiderable sum of sixpence a-head;" moreover, that "tea and rolls, and all other refreshments, were furnished on equally reasonable terms."

Oh ye gods!—so we poor innocents had been betrayed into a sixpenny tea-garden!—and sure enough, there, just

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opposite to us, perched upon a grass mound, in the—the donjon-keep of the castle I suppose, sat six merry mortals, in a state of earthly beatitude, their faces shining in the red-hot evening sun like fresh-varnished vermilion coach-panels, swilling tea and negus, and stuffing down hot rolls, bread and butter, and cold ham, with most romantic fervour. We paid our sixpences, and made our retreat as quietly and civilly as possible; having first, to pacify our conductress, poked our noses into the dirty coal-hole, stuck with bits of glass, oyster and periwinkle-shells, which she called "*The Grotto*;" and *you*, my dear Lilias, had the complaisance to mount up to the battlements of the castle, (where, by-the-by, you looked like sister Ann in Bluebeard,) in compliance with the gorgon's importunities. To *you*, therefore, we were indebted for her gracious patronage, when, on inquiring, as we left the enchanted garden, whether strangers were allowed to see Halliburn-house, she replied, with a consequential toss of her head, that *she* was well known there, and that if we applied to the butler in the name of "Madam Simpson of the Grotto," we might be sure of immediate admittance. So much for the first of our three lions; and, truly, we had obtained sixpennyworth for our sixpence, in the patronage of "Madam Simpson of the Grotto."

Five minutes' walk brought us to the next object in our itinerary, and here no *shock* awaited us. No human gorgon, no officious guide, no Madam Simpson, to fling open the low white wicket, and cry, "Walk in, ladies, for sixpence a-head."

Sole guardians of the gate, two fine old maples arched over it their interwoven boughs; and many others, and several majestic elms, were grouped together, or stood singly, in and about the churchyard. A few cottages, with pretty neat gardens, were scattered around; and, at the further end of a broad smooth grass-plat, parallel with the churchyard, and separated from it only by a low stone wall, stood the rectory, a long, low, irregularly-shaped building of common brick, and with a tiled roof, but made picturesque by the rich and mellow colouring of age, and by the

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porches, pent-houses, and buttresses, the additions of many successive incumbents, and by a noble old vine that covered the entire front, a great part of the long sloping roof, and had even been trained round one of the gables, up to the very top of a high stack of clustered chimneys.

Behind the church and rectory appeared an undulating sea of foliage, ancient oak and beech, with here and there a graceful feathery birch glancing and shivering in the sun, like silvery froth above the darker waves; and beneath those venerable trees, winded away a broad, shady, park-like road, to which a gate opened from the lane that ran along behind the church and rectory. That road was the more private approach to Halliburn House, the ancient mansion of the De la Veres; and every object in the surrounding scene was, in one way or other, associated with the past or present circumstances of that venerable race. The whole village had, in former times, been a fief of their extensive lordship, and great part of it was still in their possession. The living was in their gift, and had always been held by a younger son of their house, till the branches began to fail about the old family-tree. The church had been erected by their pious progenitors; and many succeeding De la Veres had beautified and enlarged it, and added gallery and organ-loft, and adorned the chancel with carved and gilded work, and its long window with painted glass, emblazoned with the twelve apostles, and with the family escutcheon; and had enriched its altar with pix and chalice of massy embossed silver, and with fine damask napery, and with high branched candlesticks of silver gilt, and with scarlet cushions and hassocks, bordered with broad gold lace, and sumptuously fringed and tasselled with the same. And these pious benefactions of theirs, and their good deeds that they did, and the ring of bells that they gave, and the gilt weathercock that they caused to be set up on the church-steeple, and the new face wherewith they did repair and beautify the old clock that was therein, and the marble font that they presented, and the alms-houses that they built, and the school that they endowed—are not all these things recorded, in goodly golden capitals, on divers tablets, conspicuously affixed in sundry

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and several places in the said church—to wit, over the great door, and in the centre of the organ-loft, and in five several compartments along the panelling of the long north gallery; and to each and every one of those honourable memorials, are not the names of the churchwardens of the time being, duly and reverently appended?

And on the left, as you go up the chancel, immediately beside the gilded rails of the altar, is the large, square, commodious pew of the De la Veres, to which you ascend by two steps; and its floor is covered with what hath been a rich, bright Turkey carpet, and the damask with which it is lined and cushioned, was once resplendent crimson, now faded to tawny orange, and sorely perforated by the devouring moth. And all the Testaments, Prayer-books, and Hymn-books lying on the carved oak reading-shelves, are bound in vellum, emblazoned with the arms of the De la Veres, and clasped, or have been once, with brazen or silver clasps. But some of them have bulged out of all bookish shape, and the fine parchment covers have shrunk up like sear and shrivelled leaves. That small thick Prayer-book, in particular, that was once so splendidly emblazoned—one clasp still hangs, by half a hinge, on one remaining cover—the other is quite gone from the curled and tattered leaves. And see! on that blank leaf before the title-page, is some pale discoloured writing. First, in a fine delicate Italian hand, comes the name of

"Agnes de la Vere—her book,
Y^e^ gift of her Hon^d^ Mother,
Dame Eleanor de la Vere,
june y^e^ 20^the^, 1614."

And lower down, on the same page, is again written, in larger and more antique characters—

"Mye deare Childe dyed
june y^e^ 26^the^, 1614,
in y^e^ 19^the^ yeare of her age.—
'Y^e^ Lord gave and y^e^ Lord taketh awaye.
Bless^d^ be y^e^ name of y^e^ Lord!'"

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Those words have been blotted as they were written, but not alone by the unsteady *hand* of the writer.

The book falls open at the Psalms.—See! at the xxth morning of the month—and there! there!—in that very place, almost incorporated by age into the very substance of the paper, are a few stiff, shrunken rose-leaves! They fell, doubtless, from the bosom of that young Agnes, on that happy birthday; and before those leaves were withered, the human flower had dropped into the dust! And now what matters it, or to whom, that the lovely and the loved was taken hence so early?

And all the chancel, and many other parts of the church, are covered with hatchments and monumental tablets of the De la Veres. Of the former, some so faded and blurred by age and damp, that the proud bend of the milk-white plume, towering from its coroneted crest, is scarce distinguishable from the skull that grins beneath, in the centre of its half-obliterated "Resurgam."—On the right of the altar, just opposite the family pew, is a railed-in space, containing two monuments. One of great antiquity; the other very ancient also, but of a much later age. Both are altar-tombs. The first—once deeply and richly wrought with curious carved work—is worn away (all its acute angles, and salient points, and bold projections, flattened and rounded off) to a mere oblong stone, one side of which has sunk deep into the pavement of the church. Two figures, rudely sculptured, are extended on it. One of a knight in armour—(see! that mailed hand is almost perfect,) and of a lady, whose square headgear, descending in straight folds on either side the face, is still distinguishable, though the face itself has long been worn away to a flat polished surface—just slightly indented at the place the mouth once occupied. The upper part of the knight's high Roman nose still projects from his demolished visage; and one can still trace the prominent cheek-bones and the bold martial brow—

"Outstretch'd together are express'd
He and my ladye fair,
With hands uplifted on the breast,
In attitude of prayer:

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Long-visaged—clad in armour, he—
With ruffled arm and bodice, she."

Their heads repose on a tasselled cushion, and a greyhound couches at their feet—and on the sides of the tomb——— is it really impossible to make out any part of that long inscription?———Surely some words are yet legible here and there—some letters at least. See! that great R is plain—and the next letter, i—and all the following ones may be spelled out with a little patience—and, lo! the name that was doubtless consigned to immortality—"Sir Richard De la Vere." And then!—lower down, on that third line, the word—"Plan-tagenet." And then again, "K^{g}. E—w—," Edward, surely—and those figures must have designated him Third of the name, for immediately after, "Cressy" is plainly discernible. And on the shield—what countless quarterings have been here! One may trace the compartments, but no more; and the rich mantle! and the barred helmet! and then—oh, yes—surmounting the helmet, there are the ducal coronet, and the fine ostrich plumes, the noble achievement of the De la Veres, won by that grim knight upon the plain of Cressy—"Requiescat in pace"—Sir Richard de la Vere!

And on this other tomb are also extended two figures, male and female—and theirs is the fashion of a later age. There is the slashed vest, and the bulky padded shoulders and chest, and the trunk hose, and long pointed shoes, with large rosettes, of Elizabeth's or James's era. And the small ruff and peaked beard of the male figure, and the chin, and the great thumb ring—all perfect. And the lady's little jewelled skullcap, and monstrous ruff, and hour-glass shape, and the multitudinous plaits of her nether garments. And on that compartment of the tomb, the shield, with the proud bearings, is visible enough. It hath been emblazoned in colours proper, and patches of gules and azure yet cling to the groundwork, and that griffin's claw is still sheathed or.—And the surrounding inscriptions are all legible. In the compartments opposite, are the names of "Reginald de la Vere," and "Dame Eleanor, his wife, the only daughter

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and heiress of Sir Marmaduke Hepburn." And in the next, and next, and yet another, of three "fair sonnes," who preceded their parents to the grave; and last, (here is *no vacant* space,) of "Agnes de la Vere, their onlye daughter." Ah! yes—the same. See there the end of all things! Illustrious descent—heroic deeds—worldly prosperity—parental hopes—strength, youth, and beauty!—"Sic transit gloria mundi."

Look! in that dark corner of the chancel, at the termination of that narrow passage running along from the communion-table behind the two monuments, is a low iron door, just visible from the family pew. More than half a century hath passed away since that door hath grated on its rusty hinges; but before that period, frequently were its heavy bars removed, and down the narrow stair to which it opens, generation after generation of the De la Veres descended to their "dark house of kindred dead," till no space remained unoccupied in those silent chambers. And it should seem that the extinction of the ancient race drew near, from the time that their sepulchral home, having received the apportioned number for whom its rest was prepared, closed its inexorable doors against their posterity. Certain it is, that from about this time the name has been gradually perishing away from among the rolls of the living, till it rested at last with three persons only, the son and two daughters of the tenth Reginald.

That son was named after his martial ancestor, but the last Richard De la Vere lived and died a man of peace, a widower, and childless; for the wife of his youthful love had been taken from him in the first year of their union; and from the time of her death, withdrawing from the world and from public life, and wellnigh from all neighbourly intercourse, he had lived entirely at the old family mansion with his two unmarried sisters, whose veneration for the last male survivor of their ancient race, as well as their strong affection for him, suffered them not to murmur, even in thought, at the life of total seclusion, which, in all probability, condemned them to one of celibacy. So the squire and his two faithful companions lived on together a long

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life of tranquil monotony, a vegetative dream-like existence, so unruffled by the usual accidents of "chance and change," that their very minds became stagnant, incapable of reflecting exterior objects, and insensible to the noiseless wafting of Time's pinions, that swept by so gently. But those quiet waters brooded on their own depths—on "the long-faded glories they covered;" and perhaps the pride of ancestry, and the feeling of hereditary consequence, were never more powerful than in the hearts of those three secluded persons, whose existence was scarcely remembered beyond the precincts of their own domain; whose views, and cares, and interests, had long been circumscribed by its narrow limits, and with whom the very name itself, the long transmitted name, would so soon descend into the dust and be extinct for ever. Barring this human failing, and perhaps also the unsocial retiredness of their general habits, which had grown on them imperceptibly, partly from natural shyness, heightened by indulgence into morbid feeling, and partly from the altered circumstances of the family, which they shrank from exposing to the vulgar eye—barring such human failings, these last descendants of the De la Veres were kind, and good, and pious people, beloved in their household and amongst their tenantry, and never named but respectfully, (when named at all,) even by the neighbouring gentry, with whom they had long ceased to keep up any visiting intercourse beyond the rare occurrence of a morning call. So years stole on, till age had palsied the firm step of the squire, and silvered the bright locks of the once-blooming sisters.

Then was the last branch shaken off the old sapless tree. Three withered leaves yet hung upon it, to be succeeded by no after-vegetation. First dropped the brother; and soon after the youngest of the venerable sisters; and then one poor, infirm, solitary female, the last of her race, was left alone in the desolate habitation of the once-flourishing De la Veres. But if you would know more of that antique mansion, and of its aged mistress and her immediate predecessors, you must come outside the church, for there are *their* sepulchres. There, since the closing up of the family

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vault, have the later De la Veres made their beds in the dust, though *without* the walls of the church, yet as near as might be to its subterranean chambers, and to the ashes of their kindred dead. These things that I have spoken of—those tombs and those hatchments, and the family pew, and the low iron door—are they not to be seen, even unto this day, in the ancient church of Halliburn?—you know, dear Lilias! they so engrossed our attention on our first visit to the same, that time remained not that evening for our purposed survey of the old family mansion. Besides, the churchyard was yet to be conned over, and the sun was already descending behind the distant hills. So, taking our outward survey of the venerable church, and a slight pencil sketch, almost as rapidly executed, we turned our faces homeward, reserving for another evening the further prosecution of our antiquarian researches.

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CHAPTER VII.

The third evening from our first visit to Halliburn church, found us re-assembled near the venerable structure, preparing to complete our survey of its beautiful churchyard, and afterwards to prosecute our further scheme of visiting the ancient mansion-house of the De la Veres. The burial-ground was beautifully situated, and finely shaded by majestic trees. Its field of graves, and the intersecting paths, were in that state of neat and decent order which should ever characterize the resting-place of the dead; but it contained no object of particular interest, save that enclosed space adjoining the church to which I alluded in my last chapter. That outer court of death! That supplement to the sepulchre of the De la Veres! It was a singular-looking burial-place!—the most forlorn I ever looked upon. The more so for being the only neglected spot in the whole churchyard—the only one upon which the grass was allowed to shoot up in rank luxuriance, intermingled with tall tufts of nettles and mallows; and one felt sad looking on those forsaken graves, as if the poor sleepers beneath them were unkindly excluded from the vaulted chambers within, the dark asylum of their kindred dead. It was a long strip of ground, close under, and running parallel to, the chancel wall; a projection of the building bounding it at one end, while the other and the outer side was parted off from the rest of the churchyard by a high iron railing. Within that barrier was arranged a single row of graves—eight, I think, in number—mere turfen hillocks, undistinguished by tomb or headstone, or memorial of any kind, save one, a small, mean, mural tablet of the commonest stone, affixed in that part of the church wall immediately over the eighth, and apparently the last heaped grave. But, in that poor memorial, the pride of illustrious ancestry,

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the last sparks of human vanity, were yet legible. The form was that of an armorial shield, though containing only a plain and simply worded inscription; but all the ingenuity of the rude sculptor had been exercised in carving out the sides of that coarse stone into the semblance of a mantle; and it was just discernible, after some little patient investigation, that the five uncouth lumps, issuing out of a sort of basket on the top, were designed to represent an ostrich plume, surmounting a ducal coronet. And that rude mockery of the family crest had been there affixed in contempt of heraldic fitness. The name beneath was that of a female, and the inscription ran simply—

"To the memory of
GERTRUDE DE LA VERE,
The second daughter of Reginald and
Elizabeth de la Vere,
Who departed this life May the 27th, 1820,
Aged 79 years."

What a striking contrast suggested itself between that crumbling discoloured stone, "with shapeless sculpture decked," and coarsely engraven with that simple obituary, and the polished marbles, the costly gilding, the "cunning carved work," the elaborate inscriptions, wherewith the interior of the church was emblazoned, in memory of the earlier De la Veres. Not one forgotten there—not one unrecorded, save the poor sleeper beneath that eighth grave; for, of those who tenanted the remaining seven hillocks, each had his own memorial within, arranged in due succession with those of his progenitors. It is true, that a wide disparity of sepulchral magnificence was apparent betwixt those later monuments and the proud tombs of the long-departed. A marble tablet, with a simple relievo—an urn, a cypress branch, or a funeral wreath—but on each the family achievement. Such were the recently-erected monuments, and each in succession had abated a little and a little of costly decoration, till the last (that of the late Squire) was a plain square tablet of white marble, on a black ground, bearing

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the inscription, and underneath the arms of the deceased, not sculptured, but emblazoned in colours proper, on a very small shield slightly elevated. But that plain memorial was of marble, and neatly executed, and had been respectfully added, "in order due," to the long line of family records. Wherefore, then, had the name of that poor female, that solitary outcast, no place amongst those of her ancestors and near kindred? Were there none left to honour the memory of the dead! to take order for the last respectful observances to the latest De la Vere? One sole survivor, the elder sister, had closed the eyes of that last being in whose veins ran the same stream that feebly circulated through her own. And she *had* taken order (as far as her enfeebled powers permitted) that all due observances should be respectfully attended to, and she had bethought her—confusedly, indeed, but with tenacious adherence to ancient family custom—that "*something* should be done"—"something should be ordered"—some tomb, some monument to the memory of the deceased. And thereupon the village stone-mason was called in and consulted; but the poor lady rambled strangely in her directions, so that, at last, the rustic sculptor was left almost unrestricted to the guidance of his own taste and judgment, except on one point to which Mrs. Grace steadily adhered, recurring to it as to a *point d'appui*, whenever her poor head lost itself in a labyrinth of perplexities. "The family crest—the coronet—the ostrich plume"—*that* was to be properly conspicuous. "Was not her poor dear sister a De la Vere? Almost the last—but for herself—no matter!—only—they were to be sure to leave room enough for her name under her sister's; and perhaps some one—her old steward or the minister—would see that it was engraven there."

Thus commissioned, the village artist went proudly to work, and at last finished off, to his own entire satisfaction, the mural tablet we have seen affixed over the grave of Mrs. Gertrude De la Vere. The inscription had been arranged in that concise and simple form by the rector, who, having been consulted on the subject by the aged lady, had at last prevailed over her bewildered preconception that it should

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be an elaborate composition—"in Latin, perhaps—something alluding to their illustrious ancestors—to Sir Richard De la Vere, and the battle of Cressy." But the minister was a learned man, and she was content to leave it to him; only, by her express desire, the tablet was affixed without the church, over the grave of the departed. Her motives for this request were never very clearly comprehended; only something she hinted—very distantly, for it was a tender subject—of the altered circumstances of the family—that a poor stone was all that could be afforded to the memory of its latest descendants; and "that would look poorly," she muttered to herself in a low under-tone, "amongst all those grand marbles in the chancel."

It was true that the worldly prosperity of the De la Veres had been on the decline for many successive generations; and, on the decease of the last male survivor, the aged sisters, though for the lives of both left in possession of the family mansion and its immediate dependencies, had found themselves straitened in the means of continuing the establishment on its footing of ancient respectability. But the hearts of both clung to the things, and the customs, and the fashions, which they had been habituated to from their earliest recollection, and they sacrificed many private comforts and indulgences to the pardonable weakness of keeping up every thing, as nearly as possible, in the same style as during the lifetime of their honoured parents, and of their late dear brother.

So, in outward appearance, little change was perceptible; and while the sisters were spared to each other, the stronger mind of the younger sustained and excited to beneficial exertions the more timid and desponding spirit of the elder sister. But when the latter was left utterly desolate, then indeed the burdens of care, of age, and infirmity, fell heavily upon her; and a terror of impending poverty (the phantom of a weak and depressed spirit, and distempered imagination) aggravated the real evils of her forlorn condition. Under the influence of these feelings, she had given her directions respecting that singular tablet consecrated to the memory of Mrs. Gertrude De la Vere.

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They had been, as we have seen, scrupulously attended to, and beneath her sister's name sufficient space to receive her own had been carefully left vacant. And beside her sister's grave, there was room enough for one more hillock —for *one* more only—to fill up the long strip of ground appropriated to the late De la Veres. A hundred years before, that space had been railed in from the common resting-place of the vulgar dead; but what nice calculator had *then* computed so exactly how many feet of earth would suffice to include (each in his common cell) the remnant of the ancient race?

The broad disc of the setting sun was yet high in the golden chambers of the west, when we turned from the cemetery of the De la Veres to pursue our walk towards their ancient mansion-house. Our road lay, as described, through those venerable woods, some of whose noble oaks appeared coeval with the earlier generations of the family; and many of them, in their various stages of decay, were strikingly typical of its long decline and approaching extinction. One in particular arrested our attention. Almost the last of the grove, and now, indeed, considerably in advance of it, from the decay or removal of intermediate timber, it stood singly on the open grass land immediately approximating to the mansion. It had been a superb tree, the monarch of the grove! Its bole, rugged and rifted, and of immense circumference, stood up so proudly steadfast, as if the enormous roots, spreading for many yards around, and heaving through the turf in twisted nakedness, and knots, and curious fretwork, had grappled with the very centre of the earth, and would maintain their hold, till shaken thence by nature's last convulsions. But the vast trunk was hollow at the core —hollowed out into a spacious grotto, where the sheep took shelter, and the mare, with her young colt beside her, lay down in the heat of the day. And still the mere shell, with its tough coating of rough mossy bark, was of strength sufficient to bear up the burden of the forks into which the tree branched off from its centre. Three noble limbs had they been in the days of their vigorous maturity, overspreading the earth, for many roods around, with the broad shadow of

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their leafy branches; but now despoiled of those, the gigantic arms stretched out their unsheltered nakedness in the stern grandeur of decaying greatness. Two of these forks were completely dead. From one of them the bark had dropped away, leaving it exposed in skeleton whiteness. The third showed signs of feebly lingering life—a mossy spray or two, on which a few leaves yet hung, but they were pale and sickly, and ready to fall at the first autumnal blast. The road wound along close under the trunk of that old tree. A few yards further, and we stood before the gateway of Halliburn House.

I never beheld a scene of more quiet cheerfulness than that before us—yes, of *cheerful* quiet—for however the observant eye might trace indications of decay and change, there was none of neglect and desolation—no appearance of ruin or dilapidation about the buildings, or of slovenly disorder in the homestead. It is true, the broad gravelled road of approach was no longer of that bright colour which tells of frequent renewal, and there were no tracks of carriage wheels, except of such as had passed and repassed for agricultural purposes; but it was hard and smooth, and neatly edged and weeded, and nothing could exceed the fine order, and rich verdure, of the pastures through which it wound. The people were engaged in hay-making that very evening, and the waggons were plying to and fro before the old gateway—to and fro, from the adjoining open rick-yard, within which we had a glimpse of objects strangely incongruous.

The coach-house and stables opened into the same area, surrounded on the other sides by barns, granaries, and cattle-stalls; but the line of demarcation was no longer so evident between the two departments, as it doubtless had been in the more flourishing days of the establishment. One large building had fallen entirely into decay, and, to supply the want of it, others had been converted to purposes wide of those for which they were originally designed. Part of the large barn was metamorphosed into a cart-shed, and a rough, clumsy, broad-wheeled dung-cart was stowed away in the capacious coach-house—(Oh, spirits of the de-

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parted De la Veres!)—cheek by jowl with the old family coach! that indescribable vehicle! The coach-house doors stood wide open, and we took a full survey of it. It was in shape like those lackered tin toys, (themselves, I believe, become unfashionable now,) which were the delight of children when I was a child—like the coaches in old prints and pictures, representing the setting forth of Louis le Grand and his Court, to take the air in the neighbourhood of Versailles. It was low, and broad, and deep, and carved and gilded, and all windows in the upper panels. The lower, every one emblazoned with the family arms; the ostrich plume spreading so extravagantly, as if the whole tail of an ostrich must have gone to the composition of each.

Years had elapsed since that venerable relic had moved from its resting-place, except when irreverently drawn forward or aside, to make way for the vulgar associates thrust into the space beside it once occupied by a towering phæton and a stately chariot—varnish there was none remaining on its blistered and rusty panels; a heap of oat-straw had fallen down from the raftered ceiling on its dishonoured top, and a parcel of clucking hens were pecking about and perching on its wheels and springs; while at one side window, whence in its days of glory looked forth so many fair and noble faces, in awful majesty of plume and periwig, a dunghill cock had taken his bold station, and there he stood clapping his wings, and crowing as it were in conscious exultation. The stable doors were also open, but no pampered steeds were visible in the long range of stalls; two of them were converted into calf-pens; a sick cow was tethered in a third, and by the clumsy rusty collars, and pieces of coarse harness hanging about on the others, they were apparently occupied by the farm-horses; one of these, indeed, an old blind mare, suffering from some disease in its legs, which were swathed and bandaged up, was littered in a side-stall, over which, on a painted board above the manger, the name of "Highflier" was still legible. In another, (one of those converted into calf-pens,) we read that of "Cressy." A great grey cat sat snugly trussed up on the broad ledge of one of the stall partitions; a mouser, of such

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venerable aspect, as if her early days had been contemporaneous with the prime of Highflier and Cressy. Invited by the open gates, and by the absence of the people, we took a brief survey of all these things, and then returned to the great gateway, from which we had stepped aside for a moment.

The mansion-house, comprising its several court-yards, offices, and out-buildings, occupied altogether a large square, surrounded by a stone wall, in some places scarcely breast-high, in others, (as along the principal front,) sufficiently elevated to afford a lofty broad archway, through which we passed into the first court, a square grass plat enclosed on every side by the same grey walls over which the ivy crept with its tenacious verdure, knotting itself into a leafy mass over the first archway. The second, to which we passed on over a broad stone pavement, dividing the grass plat, was far otherwise surmounted. There, conspicuous in the centre, was the family achievement, deeply and richly carved, and still almost uninjured by Time's "effacing fingers." It had evidently been cleared even of late from the encroaching ivy; but I smiled to perceive, that one idle tendril, insinuating itself round the border of the shield and through the open fretwork of the coronet, had crept up to the very top of the proud nodding plume, and flaunted as if triumphantly, above its loftiest bend. Passing under that second arch, we found ourselves in a second court, of the same dimensions, and nearly similar to the first, only that we now fronted the doorway of the mansion, and its principal bay windows. In one corner too, adjoining the house, arose a slender turret, within an arched hollow of which a great bell was visible, and above appeared the face of an old clock. In the opposite angle of the square, flourished a large white rose-tree, which had been trained far along the side wall of the court, and also against the house itself up to the very parapet. The elegant trailer was now covered with its pale blossoms, those and the light green leaves beautifully harmonizing with the quiet colouring of the old stone wall, and the general tone of chastened repose char-

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acterizing the whole—a repose unbroken, though brightened into mellow richness, by the amber hue of sunset, reflected on the long low front of the ancient dwelling, tinting its grey walls with a soft warm cream colour, gilding the projecting stonework of the rich bay windows, the dentated edges of the parapet, and the angles and pinnacles of the little turret. The grass plats were thrown into deep shadow by the surrounding wall, except that one broad sunbeam, stealing in under the archway, and along the paved walk, brightened its soft turf edges into two lines of emerald velvet, and gleaming onwards, penetrated through the open door far into the interior of the mansion. There was no stir of life—no sound audible, except the ticking of the old turret clock, and the low, broken, tender cooing of a few tame pigeons, nestling here and there on the walls and parapet, or pattering about the grass plats and pavements with their pretty rose-coloured feet, their demure looks, and soft, sleek, quaker plumage. Close beside the house-door, basking in the warm sunshine, lay a fine old hound—Sagacity itself depicted in its grave, mild countenance, its close hung ears, and long dewlaps, and in the meditative expression of its half-closed eyes. He lay there as motionless as his stone prototype, stretched out at the feet of grim Sir Richard, in Halliburn Church, and it was rather an evidence of the perfect security of that quiet dwelling and its venerable inmates, than of faithless guardianship in the old household Argus, that he showed no signs of hostility at our approach, nor otherwise noticed us than by half raising himself, with a look of courteous invitation, and wagging his tail, when, on the encouragement of that dumb welcome, we ventured near enough to pat his sleek, old head.

We looked about us—at the upper and lower windows —and through the open doorway, into a broad low, vaulted stone passage, or vestibule, terminating in the middle of the house in another of similar construction, intersecting it at right angles. No living soul was visible. We stepped over the threshold to reach the knocker of the heavy door, flung back against the inner wall. It was a huge massy door of oak planks laid obliquely, and almost blackened by age,

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studded all over with great iron knobs, and further strengthened by bars and enormous hinges of the same. The knocker was an uncouthly fashioned lump of iron, and fell from our hand with a dead sullen sound, when, after a moment's hesitation, (for it seemed almost sacrilegious to disturb that peaceful silence,) we ventured to strike two strokes on the old door. Not even an echo replied to our summons—no, nor to a second, nor a third appeal.

No bell was visible, save that in the clock-turret, and there appeared no visible means of pulling, what nevertheless was probably the usual announcement of visiters.

Loth were we to relinquish our hope of being admitted to see the interior of the house; and, after a moment's consultation, two of us—the two boldest of our party—agreed to steal in, down that inviting passage, in quest of its living inmates, if such there were, while the other two more discreetly re-trode their way to the outer demesne, to ask information of the haymakers. You and I, Lilias, were the daring twain who went in to spy out the land—I foremost in the bold intrusion, but so cowardly withal, that I stole along as motionless as the yellow sunbeam that gleamed onward before us, like a golden clue, quite to the extremity of the first broad passage, and across the second, even to the opposite wall, against which it flashed upward with a paler ray, melting gradually into the natural colour of the grey stone, and the deep shadows of the vaulted roof. Arrived at the termination of that first passage, the second presented to our view, at one end, the perspective of a half-closed door—at the other, a third intersecting vaulted way, through which again the cheerful sunshine streamed, from some unseen inlet, across the darkness of the central passage. My companion, hesitating to proceed further, slowly retreated towards the outer door, while I, with true female perseverance, looked, and longed, and lingered, yet, "let I dare not, wait upon I would, like the poor cat i' th' adage." And, lo! while I stood there, that very animal, a fine, large, demure-looking tortoise-shell, came stealing into sight, just in the stream of light which darted down the further passage. Motionless as I stood, the keen-eyed prowler caught

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a glimpse of me, and there she stopped for a moment, peering with suspicious keenness, her long body drawn out to its utmost extent, and to the thinness of a weasel, her eyes glittering like fire stones in the sunny ray, one velvet forepaw cautiously advanced, the other delicately curling inward, till, crouching gradually to the very ground, she slipped away with the swiftness of lightning, and vanished as noiselessly. The glimpse of that living creature lured me onwards, however; for I thought, by following her track, I might possibly find my way to the kitchen or offices. I was not deceived in my conjecture. The first turning to the right afforded to my choice two open door-ways, one leading into a kitchen, the other into a small wainscoted chamber, looking like a housekeeper's room. I turned into the former—a fine old-fashioned place, with a huge gaping fire-place; deep narrow windows in the thick walls—old oak benches and tables, with voluted legs, braced together with massive bars—ranges of bright pewter and fine old delft—huge round dishes, with scalloped edges—antique tea-kettles—spits on which an ox might have been roasted whole—coffee-pots, and chocolate-pots, and posset-pots, and porringers, and pipkins, little squat things upon three feet, that looked as if they could toddle about by themselves—and vessels and utensils of all shapes and sizes, wares, and metals, whose proper use it would have puzzled any soul to determine, save he, that wight well versed in ancient lore, who has written so learnedly on culinary antiquities. I could have worshipped the very pot-lids! But there was no time to indulge the idolatrous longing, and alas! no creature visible—no living creature but my tortoise-shell guide, who had taken up her station before the glowing wood fire on the hearth, over which, suspended by a monstrous crook, hung a great black tea-kettle, spitting and sputtering in concert with the drowsy hum of Madam Grimalkin. "I took but one look, and then tore myself away," peeping for a moment, as I passed it, into the adjoining small apartment. That was also vacant—but through the wide lattice window I spied a small green court, bordered under the surrounding walls with beds of sweet and useful herbs and

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shrubs, and a few flowers—coxcombs and love-lies-bleeding were trailing on the bright smooth turf—Two sweet bay-trees flourished in opposite corners, and everlasting peas clung to the wall, and here and there a fine old rosemary, and many sweet old-fashioned herbs. Peppermint and basil, and sweet marjoram, and fragrant lavender, had their place amongst polyanthuses and sweet-williams, within the feathery fringe of London pride.

Another, and another look, I stole through the open lattice, at that lovely little garden.

The possession of such a one would have satisfied all my ambition as a landholder, but I called to mind the tenth commandment, and turned hastily away to rejoin my friends without. They, meanwhile, had been successful in their application to the haymakers, and I met them re-entering the second court, accompanied by a little old humpbacked dame, with small, twinkling, three-cornered, blue eyes, with red rims, and two pink puckered cheeks, like frost-bitten pippins. She looked like one of the appurtenances of the place, and seemed familiar with everything relating to "the family." From her we learned, that the whole domestic establishment, (now reduced to a very few servants,) had turned out into the hay-field, with the exception of the housekeeper, who had walked into the village, "Miss Grace's maid," (for so the aged dame called her still more aged mistress,) who was sitting in her lady's sick-chamber, and a footman, who was somewhere about the offices, she supposed, and whom she would seek out, and send to us. So we stood quietly waiting in this beautiful court-yard, caressing the old dog, and examining the rich bay windows, while the dame passed into the house, on the mission she had undertaken in our service.

Whoever would know more of Halliburn House, will wait with us, till we learn the result of her embassy.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Our old woman was so long absent on her mission, that I suspect the footman she went in search of was also to be summoned from the hay-cart, or the rick-burton. At last, however, he made his appearance from the interior of the house, shrugging up, as he came towards us, (as if hastily slipped on,) a long brown livery-coat, ample enough in its dimensions to have served him for a surtout, and so gorgeously trimmed with broad blue and orange lace, and silver tags, as to be little in keeping with his grey worsted hose, clumsy hobnailed shoes, and soiled cravat, loosely knotted about the open shirt-collar. His honest, ruddy, shining face, gave evidence beside, that he had been hastily called off from his rural labour; and his straight yellow hair was pasted down on his forehead, but not by the artificial medium of *huile antique* or *pommade au jasmin*. We set him down for the grandson or great-nephew of some old steward or butler; and, through all its native rusticity, there was a respectful intelligence in his manner of replying to our queries, which proved him to have had "his bringing up" in the well-ordered household of an old-fashioned English gentleman. We had further evidence of this as he escorted us through the apartments we were permitted to see, and pointed out to our notice, in a modest, unobtrusive manner, very different from the general style of guides at show-houses, such things as were most worthy of remark, and those amongst the pictures and portraits as were considered most interesting. To our first application to be allowed to see the interior of the house, we received for answer, that it was seldom shown to strangers, and just then that Mrs. De la Vere was seriously ill: he feared it would be impossible to admit us; but if we pleased to send in our cards, his lady might possibly give orders that we should be shown

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through the lower apartments. We gave him our names accordingly, and in a few minutes he returned with the desired permission.

Proceeding through the vestibule, he led us down that right-hand passage to the door I had remarked in my late exploring *entrée*. It opened into a sort of anti-room, which looked rather like a small entrance hall to some forester's lodge, for it was hung about with all sorts of implements for rural sports—guns, fishing-rods, fowling-nets, landing-nets —spurs, bits, and snaffles, of all sorts and fashions—deers' antlers, stuffed birds and vermin—and pictures of dead game, dogs and horses, and of various memorable fox-chases; and a variety of incongruous articles of furniture were here also collected together, as if useless at the present day, but too sacred as ancient relics to be more irreverently disposed of. Amongst others, I noticed a great old beehive porter's chair, in which was comfortably cradled a large grey and white cat, with a litter of kittens; and hard by its venerable contemporary, a heavy, high-backed, narrow-bottomed, tapestry settee, with one arm and five legs, the sixth wanting—the said arm, a bare, lean, wooden limb, poking out from the tapestry, in guise of certain human elbows, that I have seen protruding from female sides, over which one longed to draw down the puckered-up apology for a sleeve, that looked like the puffed-out handle of a basket-hilted sword—desperate inroads had been made by the devouring moth in the wrought covering of that disabled veteran. They had eaten up three-fourths of Holofernes' head, the head and legs of Judith's maid, and the best part of Judith herself; and yet we contrived to make out the story at a first glance, so keen was our antiquarian discrimination.

Through this museum of ancient relics, we passed on into a second chamber, the first glimpse of which drew from us a simultaneous exclamation of delight. Stepping over its threshold, we seemed suddenly transported out of these stupid commonplace modern times, into that old world of romance and chivalry, which looks so picturesque through the mellow haze of antiquity. It was a long vaulted chamber, terminating, at the further end, in a wide and beautiful bay

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window, one of those that looked into the interior court-yard. The walls were panelled with some light-coloured wood, beautifully veined and polished, and wrought out in the richest and most fanciful carved work in the deep cornices, and the mouldings round the compartments. The vaulted ceiling was also groined in compartments of the most curious and intricate workmanship; the darker wood whereof the ground-work was composed, finely relieving the pale groining, and showing to the greatest advantage the minutest beauties of its elegant combinations. The floor was tesselated in a pattern of large octagons, filled up with small checkers alternately red and yellow, and surrounded by borders of a running chain-work, a deeper edge of which, with some additional ornamental stripes, ran round the whole. Mantelpieces, brackets, screens, chairs, table—every thing was in keeping in that delightful chamber: and it was hung round with portraits, all interesting from their antiquity, and a few especially so, as rare and curious specimens of ancient art. There were two Holbeins, flat, shadowless, edgy compositions, but characteristic of the unquestionable merit of the artist, and as portraits deeply interesting. They were those of Elizabeth, then the Lady Elizabeth, and of her brother, the young royal Edward, (that brightest gem of England's buried hopes,) of whom the world was not worthy, neither the inheritance of a mortal crown. The effigies of many De la Veres, and of worthies lineally and collaterally allied to them, were ranged in the other compartments; and I was particularly struck with that of a fair young creature in the earliest bloom of womanhood, whose full heavy eyelids cast the shadow of their long lashes on her soft pale cheek, as she looked down upon the white rose her delicate fingers were inserting in the jewelled stomacher. "Ah!" thought I, "that must be the fair Agnes; and that picture must have been finished on her nineteenth birthday; and on that very day, fell from that same white rose, the leaves found so lately in that old prayer-book." Having thus arranged the story entirely to my own satisfaction, I should not have thanked any body for telling me I was mistaken—so I asked no questions. I could have dreamt away hours

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and hours—ay, days and days, in that interesting chamber; but the door through which we were to pass into a third apartment was already open, and I could only linger for a moment on the threshold to indulge in a farewell survey. From that door of communication, one looked down the whole length of the room to the beautiful bay window—

"A slanting ray of evening light
Shoots through the yellow pane;
And makes the faded crimson bright,
And gilds the fringe again.
The window's Gothic framework falls
In oblique shadows on the walls.
How many a setting sun had made
That curious lattice-work of shade!"

I never beheld a chamber so adapted for the retreat of a studious, meditative man—so quiet, so solemn, so almost holy, yet untinctured with gloom, was the character of chastened repose that pervaded it! Looking down from that further end, where I stood in shadow, it required no strong effort of imagination to conjure up forms of the long-departed—a visionary group—harmonizing with the scene, the surrounding objects, and the mellow richness of that sunset hour. Place but a pile of ancient tomes on that carved table near the window, a roll or two of vellum, and an antique standish, and in that high-backed crimson chair a fair young lady, "of a sweet, serious aspect," and beside her a venerable old man, to whose grave, pleasant countenance her eyes are raised with a questioning look of sweet intelligence, while the forefinger of her small white hand points out a passage in that open folio, whose crabbed character can be no other than Greek. And now she looks up at that opposite picture of the young princely Edward, and the eyes of her venerable companion follow the direction of hers; and then a glance of sympathetic pleasure is exchanged, that tells they are discoursing of England's hope. And, see! a slanting sunbeam stealing upward across the old man's snowy beard, plays on her silken ringlets of paly gold, and

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on the dazzling whiteness of her innocent brow, investing it with seraphic glory! Master and pupil they must be, that interesting pair; master and pupil—the learned and the lovely—the beauty of youth and age! Who other than the Lady Jane Grey, and her venerable Ascham? All this passed before the eyes of my imagination in about the same space of time that it took the Sultan to dip his head into the pail of water, or the Dean of Badajoz to turn that wonderful page, in the mere act whereof he passed through all grades of ecclesiastical rank, even to the chair of St. Peter, before Dame Jacintha had put down the second partridge to roast.

My recall from the realms of magic was less disagreeable than the worthy dean's, however, as casting behind me "one longing, lingering glance," I followed my friends into that third apartment, which had the appearance of being the common sitting-room of the ancient lady of the mansion. Our guide called it the drawing-room; and, compared with those of the suite we had just seen, its fitting up might have been called almost modern. High panelled wainscoting, painted white, with gold mouldings, and the walls above—the narrow strip of wall—covered with a once-costly India paper, the large running pattern of which, on a pale yellow ground, was of scrawly branches, with here and there a palm-leaf and a flower, and birds, butterflies, and flying jars and baskets, all edged and veined with gold, dispersed over the whole in regular confusion. The high carved mantelpiece was decorated by two stupendous girandoles, and loaded with precious porcelain monsters, and other antique china; as was likewise a curious old Japan cabinet at the further end of the apartment. There was only one table in the room—(Oh, Gothic drawing-room!)—a very small inlaid Pembroke table, placed geometrically in the centre of a rich, square Turkey carpet, which reached not within a yard of the skirting-board. There were *no* volumes of the poets splendidly bound—*no* elegant inkstands and morocco blotting-books—*no* silver-clasped albums—*no* musical-boxes, and agate-boxes, and ivory-boxes, and filigree-boxes, and pincushions in the shape of lyres, and penwipers in the

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shape of butterflies, and foreign curiosities, and curious nondescripts, disposed with happy carelessness and picturesque effect on that same table. No—sacred was its polished surface from all such profane litter—inviolate, no doubt, since its creation, from all uses save those for which it was especially ordained—to receive the silver tea-tray every evening duly as the clock struck six, and the chased tea-kettle and lamp, and the two rare old china plates of rich seed-cake, and wafer-bread and butter.

There were two settees in the room, not dragged out higgledy-piggledy into the middle of the floor, according to the indecorous fashion of our degenerate days, but soberly and symmetrically placed on either side the old cabinet, from which, and from the wall behind them, in all likelihood they had never been divorced since their first establishment there. Noways resembling our square deep sofas, loaded with down-cushions, or our Grecian couches, or luxurious Ottomans, these venerable *im*movables, with their four little brown legs with claw-feet—(no "wheeling" *them* round—they must have walked, if they had moved at all)—their hard narrow seats, and high upright backs, sloping down at the sides into two little wings, spread out like those of an old buggy, looked just big enough to contain one lady with a hoop, or, haply, a pair of courting lovers; the fair one, perchance, in a full-trimmed yellow sacque, with deep ruffles, and peaked shoes, the points of which, "like little mice, peep out" from underneath the pinked and crimped furbelowed petticoat, and her hair strained up so tight over a high cushion, parapeted with little flowers and bodkins, and one small ostrich feather drooping coquettishly over the left ear, as to draw up the outer corners of her eyes like button-holes, adding infinite piquancy of expression to the sweet simpering modesty with which she affects to look down on that great green fan. "Then the lover," in a bag and solitaire, a pea-green silk coat, lined with jonquil, an embroidered waistcoat, with prodigious flaps, languishing towards her—the off-leg sticking straight out like the leg of a woodcock—one arm supported on the back of the settee, the other, the ruffled hand at least, with a brilliant ring on the

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crooked-up little finger, presenting a full-blown rose to the goddess of his idolatry, while he warbles in falsetto,

"Go, rose! my Chloe's bosom grace!"

Many such tender passages, between the former occupants of these old settees, were doubtless rehearsed thereon in the "mellow days" of generations past. To far other purposes were they now devoted. On one of them we remarked a little short black satin cloak, lined with squirrel skin, and edged with ermine all round, and at the arm-holes. It was carefully laid over one elbow of the settee, against which rested a tall ivory gold-headed walking-stick; and upon the cloak was deposited a very small shallow-crowned bonnet, also of black satin, lined with white; a deep lace curtain round the queer, little, flat poke, and no indication of strings—the cockernonny being evidently fixed on, when worn, by a couple of black corking-pins, which were, indeed, stuck in readiness in a pair of long, brown, snuff-colour gloves, laid palm to palm beside the bonnet—the tip of the forefinger and thumb wanting from the right hand glove.

There were three windows in the room looking into a fourth court, so far differing from the others, that the outer wall consisted of a mere pediment, finished by a stone balustrade, and opening into a fine orchard by a wrought-iron gate. On the massy side-pillars of the gateway, and all along the balustrade, were ranged stone vases filled with white lilies, hollyhocks, red and yellow marvels of Peru, and branching larkspurs; and in the centre of the grass-plot stood a fine old sundial on its rich carved spiral pedestal. Such was the "look-out" from those three windows. Between them were two pier-glasses in deep carved gilt frames, having branches for lights affixed to them. Underneath were two marble slabs; on one of which were very methodically arranged a Bible and Common Prayer-Book, Mrs. Glass's Cookery, Broome's Poems, the Book of Martyrs, Pamela, "A Funeral Sermon on the Death of the Lady Cuts," Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy, Jeremy Taylor's Golden

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Grove, "The *Tête-à-Tête* Magazine," and the Red Book for the year 1790. On the other stood a very antique-looking embossed silver salver, bearing two delicately transparent chocolate cups of eggshell china, yet exhaling the perfume of the grateful beverage they had recently contained, and a chased gold-handled knife lay beside a very inviting rich seed-cake, on a fine old china plate. Beneath those two pier tables stood two most magnificent china jars, containing such pot-pourris as could hardly have been concocted with the cloves, roses, and gillyflowers of these degenerate days—"Poperies," as I once heard the word pronounced by a worthy old gentlewoman, who believed, doubtless, that the fashion of those fragrant vases had been imported among us from the Vatican by some patriotic traveller, who had begged a receipt from the Pope, just as she would beg Mrs. Such-a-one's receipt for "mock-turtle," or "calves' head surprised." Before either end-window was placed a small claw-table, or stand, supporting, one, a glass globe with gold fish, the other a splendid gilt wire cage, containing an old grey parrot with gouty legs, who sat winking and blinking in his swing, croaking every now and then an unintelligible something, except that once or twice he articulated, very distinctly—"Pretty Miss Grace!—Poor Puss!—Noble Sir Richard!"

A few framed pictures and fancy pieces were hung round the room in a straight line, very little below the cornice. There was a basket of artificial flowers, delicately and beautifully wrought from raised card. A shell-piece equally ingenious. A stuffed kingfisher, and a ditto cockatoo to match; and betwixt the twain, a landscape worked with black silk upon white satin, representing a castle with four towers, like pepper-boxes. A rock with a tree upon it, the sea washing its base, done in little zig-zag waves in herring-bone, and a tall three-decker overtopping rock, tree, and castle, sailing in stern foremost, "The Cressy" being worked thereon in letters as long as the castle windows. In one corner of the picture, modestly wrought into the basement of the castle, was the name of the fair artist, "Grace De la Vere, her work, June 10, 1760." And that

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miracle of female taste and ingenuity was not without its pendant. Another picture, wrought with the same materials, on a similar ground, and in a style as fancifully chaste, but of more ambitious character. It was a scripture-piece, showing forth (as the beholder was considerably informed by a labelled inscription at the top, festooned up by two little cherubims, one of whom was also slily puffing out in one corner the name of "Gertrude De la Vere,") the finding of Moses in the bulrushes—a stupendous piece! There stood the Egyptian princess and her maidens, and the bulrushes, (marvellous tall ones they were!) all in a row, like four-and-twenty fiddlers. And lo! Pharaoh's daughter was depicted in a hoop and lappets, and having on her head the crown-royal; and then the genius of the artist had blazed out in a bold anachronism, having designed that golden circlet in the fashion of an English ducal coronet, crested with the five ostrich plumes of the De la Veres! And then one of the attendant damsels, *agenouillée* before her royal mistress, was handing up to her little Moses in his reedy ark, in semblance very like a skinned rabbit in a butter-basket. And then his sister, Jochebed, was seen sprawling away in the background like a great mosquito sailing off in the clouds; and the clouds were very like flying apple-dumplings—and the whole thing was admirable! prodigious! inimitable! and wellnigh indescribable, though, to the extent of my feeble powers, I have essayed to do it justice. Moreover, there stood in that apartment two large square fire-screens, worked in tent-stitch; and so well were they wrought, and so well had the worsteds retained their colours, that the large rich flowers in their fine vases—the anemones, roses, jonquils, and gillyflowers, seemed starting from the dark ground of the canvass. On one of those screens, close to the fire-place, hung a capacious white network bag, lined with glazed cambric muslin, and fringed all round; it hung by one string only, so that a shuttle and a ball of knotting had fallen out from it on a chair alongside. There were a few grains of dust on that hard snowball, and on the blue damask chair-cushion, but they were of a nature that set me sneezing, when I took up, with a feeling of

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melancholy interest, the monotonous work which had probably constituted, for so many silent hours, the chief and only amusement of the solitary old lady. That sprinkling of snuff, and the scarcely extinguished ashes in the grate, (the ashes of a July fire!) looked as if she had recently occupied the apartment; and on enquiring of the servant, we were told that she had been down that afternoon for a very short time, but that the exertion had quite overpowered her, and she had returned so ill to her chamber, that it was doubtful whether she would ever again leave it in life. "There had been a great change of late in his lady," the man added; and the parson and the old housekeeper had at last prevailed on her to let them send for a distant relation of the family's, on whom indeed the property was entailed, which very circumstance had hitherto excluded him from Halliburn House; as Mrs. Grace had been wont to say, "it would be time enough for *him*—a Ravenshaw!—to come and take possession, when the last De la Vere was laid in her cold grave."

I could not help thinking of this *Mister Richard Ravenshaw* with a sort of jealous aversion, as if I, too, were a last lineal descendant of the old race whose name was so soon to be extinct in their ancient inheritance.

Slowly, thoughtfully, almost sadly, we retraced back our steps to the door of entrance. Just as we reached it, the last sunbeam was shrinking away from under the archway of the outer court, and the old turret-clock struck out the eighth hour of the evening. Its tone was peculiarly mellow, deep, and solemn; or perhaps the stillness of the place and of the hour, the shadows that were falling round, and the corresponding seriousness of our feelings and thoughts, combined to swell and modulate a common sound into one of solemn intonation. It must have penetrated, however, (through that deep quietness,) into every corner of the mansion, and was heard, doubtless, in the sick chamber. How many De la Veres had listened to that warning voice! Of how many had it proclaimed the hours of their birth, and of their death!—the setting forth of the marriage-train, and the departure of the funeral procession! By how many

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had its strokes been numbered with youthful impatience, and eager hope, and joyful expectation! By how many more with sad foreboding, and painful weariness, and sorrowful retrospection! By how many a quick ear and beating heart, long since stopped with dust and cold in the grave! And still at its appointed hour that restless voice resounded—and still it told its awful tidings to a descendant of the ancient race—to "the dull cold ear" of age of the last living De la Vere! A few more circles yet to be revolved by those dark hands around the dial-plate, and she too would have closed her account with Time, and the solemn hour of its summing up would be sounded forth by that iron tongue through the quiet courts of Halliburn, and over its venerable woods! Then, methought, fain would I silence for ever the voice from that old turret, that never sound thereof should announce the arrival of an alien and a stranger, to take rule and lordship over the lands of the De la Veres, and possession of their antique dwelling-place.

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CHAPTER IX.

I HAVE no very poetical fancies about my last earthly resting-place—at least no COCKNEY poetical fancies. It would afford me no particular satisfaction to know that my ashes shall repose in the centre of a sweet little pet island, (as the young ladies say,) like a green velvet pincushion in the middle of a beautiful pond inhabited by Muscovy ducks, and frilled round with lilacs and laburnums—that an urn of the purest alabaster and most classical form, appropriately inscribed with a few words, condensing volumes of simple pathos, shall mark the consecrated spot overhung by the vegetable weepers of the pale pensile willow. "All this to know," would afford me very little satisfaction; yet I am by no means without my prepossessions on this matter—equally absurd ones, perhaps, if subjected to the severe test of reason, and too much divested of sentimental elegance, to interest the feelings of refined taste.

I would fain lie down to rest under the same sod which has received the deposit of my kindred earth. It is in vain that I argue with myself: What matters where the poor frame shall return to corruption, from which its immortal inhabitant is departed? What matters it how far we sleep asunder from those beloved in life—when it is but for the *night of slumber*—when, at the dawn of the eternal day, the same clarion shall awaken all at the same moment, and assemble us together from the remotest ends of the earth, and from the unfathomed depths of the great sea? It is all in vain that I thus argue with myself, and in my wiser moments strive to think thus. Nature's resistless pleading—her tender infirmity, triumphs over the cold suggestions of reason; and my heart cherishes the fond anticipation that I may be gathered in death to the sepulchre of my people. —Moreover, I would fain make my bed with the lowly in

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death—I would fain be laid decently at rest—not within the walls of my parish church—polluting the holy temple with corruption—but in its outer court, the common burial-ground, in the midst of those of all stations, whose faces have been familiar to me, whether as those of friends, neighbours, or acquaintances, or as hearers of the same word, guests at the same altar with me, partakers of the same cup, professors of the same faith, sharers in the same hopes, believers in the same resurrection. Amongst these would I lie down undistinguished, with no other monument than a plain headstone—no other covering than the green turf. Let no cold heavy tomb be laid upon its soft light texture. Methinks I would not have even my grave excluded from the bright sunbeams and the blessed air, whose sweet influences are to me the elixir of life.

Such are the most romantic fancies I have ever indulged with regard to my allotted place of sepulchre. But I will confess one other weak prejudice relating to it. I have a horror, an inexpressible horror, of being committed to the earth of a London cemetery:—those dungeons of death—those black, dismal, wall-imprisoned fields of corruption, more abhorrent to my feelings than the Neapolitan pits of promiscuous sepulchre, or those appalling receptacles of mortality, where the dead of the Parsees are left exposed to blacken in the sun, or to gorge the carrion birds, who gather unmolested to their accustomed banquet. A London burying-ground is more horrible than these. There the stillness of death is indeed appalling, contrasted with the surrounding ceaseless roar of the living multitude—the stir of the vast city, pouring through all its avenues the tide of restless population. Those gloomy wall-surrounded fields of death are not, however, the most gloomy burial-grounds contained in the metropolis. I have passed some old black-looking parish churches—in the city, I think—half buried in their adjoining small crowded cemeteries—so crowded, it is frightful to think of it—elevated high above the dark narrow street—generation on generation—tier on tier—coffin on coffin piled, heaped up one above the other with unseemly haste—a mound of decomposed mortality, at thought of which, of the

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more recent deposits in particular, imagination recoils, and the heart sickens. And then those dingy tombstones, with the black, filmy, sooty pall clinging about them! those dismal vaporous hangings! that rank black grass! those long yellow sickly nettles! and those pale livid fungi, looking like pestilent excrescences, the horrid fruitfulness of that tainted mould!—I have hurried past those dismal receptacles with averted eyes, and restrained respiration, as from the vicinity of a pest-house. And yet once—once indeed—I lingered long and voluntarily within the precincts of St. ———. But I will not name the church. My visit was to one of its surrounding graves, to which I had been attracted by some affecting circumstances which had been related to me of its poor tenant. England had afforded her that last gloomy resting-place, but she was not a native of its soil; and the inscription on the modest headstone placed over her remains, told that "Blanche D'Albi, born in 1801, in the canton of Zurich, Switzerland, departed this life in Lombard-street, London, in the year 1820." Oh, simple record! more eloquent, more touching, than all that poetry and sentiment could have woven into the most diffuse epitaph.

So far from her country, her kindred, and her home—taken away so early, in the very bud of life; there, amongst the dust of strangers, under those black walls, beneath that rank soil, those baleful weeds, lay the daughter of that lovely mountain land, to which, doubtless, in the happy, sanguine confidence of youth, she had so often anticipated the rapturous hour of her return. All this, and more than this, was suggested to the heart by that brief inscription. But it did not tell all. It did not tell that the young creature who slept below had been singularly beautiful—of the happiest and gentlest nature—engaging to a very unusual degree, the darling of fond parents; the happiest maiden of her happy land, the blithest bird of her native mountains, till——But why not relate at once the few simple notices which have fallen in my way, connected with the brief existence of the young stranger? They will form, at best, but an imperfect and very eventful story, but such a one as found

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its way to my heart, and may interest those whose tastes and feelings are yet unperverted by the feverish excitement and exaggerated tone of modern fiction.

Blanche D'Albi, at the time of her decease, had been for more than a twelvemonth resident in the family of Mr. L——, one of the wealthiest merchants in the city of London. She had been engaged as French governess to his four little daughters, who were also provided with an English teacher, and attended by half the masters in the metropolis. The young Swissess had been received on the most unexceptionable recommendation, as to character, connexions, and elegant acquirements; but nothing more of her private history was communicated, than that she was the only daughter of a respectable Protestant minister; that the sudden death of both her parents, occurring within a few months of each other, had left her, at the age of eighteen, a destitute orphan, deprived of the protection of an only brother, who, previous to the death of their parents, had taken service in the Swiss corps of De Meuron, and had accompanied that regiment to India. So situated, Blanche D'Albi had recourse for her future maintenance to the expedient so often resorted to, even under happier circumstances, by numbers of her young countrywomen.

In company with several young persons from her own canton, embarked on the same enterprise, and provided with such recommendations as could be obtained to mercantile houses in London, or to such of their own countrymen as were already established there, Blanche bade adieu to her "own romantic land;" and very shortly after her arrival in England, it was her good fortune to be engaged in the family of Mr. L——, where her situation might with truth have been called almost enviable, compared with the general lot of young persons in the same circumstances. She shared the schoolroom, and the task of educating four engaging, spoiled children, with an elderly English governess, to whose domineering, but not harsh temper, she willingly yielded supremacy, and was therefore treated by Miss Crawfurd with somewhat of the indulgent consideration she would have bestowed on an elder pupil. The little girls soon at-

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tached themselves fondly to their young, indulgent governess, and their affection soon obtained for her all the goodwill and unbending kindness it was in the nature of Mrs. L—— to confer on any human being in a dependent situation. Mr. L——, a man of cold and formal manners, fully impressed with the sense of his own wealth and consequence, but one whose better feelings were not all sacrificed at the shrine of Mammon, treated her with invariable and almost attentive politeness, during the stated intervals, when, in attendance on her young charges, she was admitted to his society. It is true, he exchanged but few words with her, and those appeared constrained, as if by the latent fear of compromising his dignified importance; but there was a gentleness in the tone of his voice when he addressed himself to the timid orphan, and a benevolence in his eyes, which carried with them to the young bereaved heart of Blanche D'Albi, a far kindlier signification than was implied by the mere words of his invaried formal salutation, "I hope you are well to-day, Ma'amselle?"

Blanche had not only every comfort but many luxuries at her command, especially that which she prized beyond all others, the disposal of her own time for some hours in the evening of each day. Taking all circumstances into consideration, therefore, the young emigrant might be pronounced singularly fortunate in having so soon found shelter in so secure a haven. And she felt that Providence had been very gracious to her, and her heart was grateful and contented. But was she happy? Who ever asked that question? Who ever doubted that she was so in a situation so favoured with peculiar advantages? The home she lost, the friends she had left, the brother so widely separated from her, the recollection of her own dear village, and of her young happy years. No one ever inquired into, or interested themselves about all these things. No voice inviting confidence ever interrupted those deep and silent spells of inward vision, when all the past was busy in her heart, and one frank kind question, one affectionate word, would have unlocked—as from the source of a fountain—all the ingenuous feelings, all the tender recollections, all the anxious

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thoughts and innocent hopes, that were crowded together in that pure sanctuary, cherished and brooded over in secret and in silence, till the playful vivacity of her nature (its characteristic charm in happier days) was subdued into a tone of almost reserved seriousness. At times, during the play-hours of the children, when they had coaxed her to mingle in their innocent sports—at such times the playful beauty of her nature would break out into a gleam of its former brightness; and then her laugh was so joyous, her countenance so sparkling, her voice so mirthfully in unison with their childish glee, that a stranger would have taken her for the eldest sister, and the happiest of those four happy children.

Those, also, were among her whitest moments, when, encircled by her young attentive auditory, she spoke to them—for to *them* she could speak of it—of her own native land; of its high mountains, whose tops were white with snow in the hottest summer days; of the seas of ice, with their hard frozen ridges; of its beautiful, clear lakes, on one of which she and her little brother had been used to row their fairy bark. Of the Chalets, where, in their mountain rambles, they had been feasted on rural dainties by the hospitable peasants; of the bounding chamois, and of their daring hunters, amongst whom her brother Theodore, and a young friend of his whom she called Horace, had been foremost in bold enterprise; and then she told how, once returning from a long and venturous chase, the friends had brought her home a little wounded chamois; and the children never tired of hearing how she had nursed and reared, and at last, with success almost unexampled, brought to perfect tameness the wild creature of the mountain; and how Horace Vaudreuil (they had learned to speak his name and that of Theodore familiarly) had encircled its slender elegant neck with a small silver collar, on which was engraven, "*J'appartiens à Blanche.*"

Once the little inquisitive creatures had innocently questioned her about her parents—asking, if she had loved them as dearly as they did their papa and mamma; but then the only answer they obtained was, that the mirthful voice of

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their cheerful playfellow died away into a tremulous, inarticulate sound; and that, suddenly hiding her face on the fair bosom of the youngest child, who was seated on her lap, she gave way (for the first time before them) to an agony of tears and sobs, that wrung their young hearts with distressful sympathy, and soon melted them all to tears as they clung round her, with their sweet, loving, broken consolations. There is something more soothing in the caressing tenderness of childish sympathy, than in all the consolatory efforts of mature reason. In the first agony of a bereaved heart, or rather when the first benumbing shock is passing away, who would not shrink from rational comforters—from persuasive kindness—from the very voice of friendship itself, to weep unrestrainedly in the clasping arms of an infant, on its pure, innocent bosom? It is as if a commissioned angel spoke peace from heaven—pouring the balm of heavenly comfort on a wound too recent to bear a touch less gentle, less divine?

From that hour the little girls spoke only of Theodore and Horace, when, collected round Blanche, they pleaded for one of her "pretty stories about Switzerland." From the secret indulgence of tender recollections, and dreamy hopes, Blanche insensibly fell into those habits of abstraction too common to persons of imaginative minds, and deep and repressed sensibility; and not unfrequently she drew upon herself the sharp observation of Miss Crawfurd, or the cold surprise of Mrs. L——, by starting, in bashful confusion, at the repetition of some question or remark which had failed in rousing her attention when first addressed to her. It was an evil habit, and Blanche was conscious of its being so; and she listened with penitent humility to Miss Crawfurd's school lectures on the "affectation and ill-breeding of young persons who gave way to absence of mind," and to Mrs. L——'s wonder at "what Mademoiselle could be thinking of."

What could she be thinking of?—Oh, heavens! in that dull square—pacing those formal walks, under those dusty trees—in that more dull, more formal drawing-room, when the prattling tongues of her little charges were no longer at

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liberty—when she felt herself indeed a stranger and an alien—what could she think of, but of the days that were past, and of those that might be in store for her, if ever . . . . And then there swam before her eyes visions of a white, low dwelling, all embowered in honeysuckle—of a little green wicket in a sweet-brier hedge—and of one who leant over it, idling away the precious moments, long after he had presented the garland or the nosegay, arranged for her hair or her bosom; and then the scene changed to a grass-plat and a group of linden-trees, and her own dear parents sat under their shade, with other elders of the village, whose children were mingling with her in the merry dance on that fine greensward, to the sweet tones of Theodore's flute; and then there were parting tears, and inarticulate words—and the agony of young hearts at a first separation—and a little boat lessening across the lake—and waving hands—and the last glimpse, on the opposite shore, of glittering uniforms and waving plumes; and then there was darkness, and fear, and trouble—and the shadow of death fell on the dear white cottage, and a sullen bell tolled—and, yet again—and one funeral, and then another, wound away, from its low entrance, across the grass-plat beneath the linden-trees, towards the church, where the new minister . . . . .

But the fond dreamer shut her eyes to exclude that torturing sight—and then—and then the harsh voice of some cold observer (all voices sound harshly to senses so absorbed) recalled her to reality, and to painfully confused consciousness of the surprise and displeasure her inattention had excited.

Poor Blanche!—Thou hadst been the beloved of many hearts!—the darling of some!—the object of almost exclusive affection!—How difficult to be contented with less!—How cold, by comparison, the after-interest we may awaken in other hearts—even in gentle and tender ones—whose first affections are yet given to dearer claimants!—How hard to endure the measured kindness of mere well-wishers—the constrained courtesy of well-bred indifference—the unintentional slight of the regardless many—the cutting

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contumely of the malicious few!—How withering, contrasted with former looks of love, and its endearing tones, the severe glance of a censorious eye—the harsh inflection of a reproving voice!—How bitter to remember all one *has been* to some dear, departed being—and to feel that one *is nothing*, comparatively *nothing*, to any living creature in this wide, wide world!

Some of these sad experiences had fallen not unfrequently to the lot of the fair orphan—had fallen like ice-bolts on the youthful enthusiasm of her confiding nature; but, though checked by that untimely frost, the sensitive blossom had but shrunk inward, nourished in secret by the warm well-spring of Hope, which lay hidden in the deep recesses of her heart.

Twice, since her residence in the family of Mr. L——, the monotonous existence of Blanche had been diversified by occurrences of unspeakable importance to her. Twice had she received letters from India—voluminous letters, penned by more than one hand, though contained in the same envelope directed by her brother. She wept abundantly over the first of these packets—over her brother's letter—his reply to that in which she had communicated to him their mutual loss, and her own plans to seek an honourable subsistence as governess in some English family. It is easy to conceive the deeply affecting purport of that fraternal answer. Even from that fearful distance the hearts of the orphans met and mingled. The tears of Theodore had blotted the lines, on which those of Blanche fell, as she read, like summer rain-drops—as free, as fast, and as kindly—lightening her heart of the long pent-up load of unparticipated grief.

But Theodore's letter contained one written in a different handwriting; and though the tears of Blanche still fell as she perused those characters, they were the last drops of the shower, through which a sunbeam was already breaking. Upon the contents of that packet she might have been said to live for many weeks; for day after day her eyes fed upon them, till one of her little, innocent observers asked, in a tone of artless sympathy, if she were not tired

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of trying to learn all that close, long writing by heart, which had vexed her so much, too, at the first reading.

The second letters were as eagerly and anxiously opened as the former had been. But these were read with glistening eyes only, while the rekindled light of gladness beamed on the ingenuous countenance of Blanche; and sometimes, in the midst of some twentieth re-perusal, as if her heart sought sympathy in the exuberance of its happiness, she would catch up in her arms, and half smother with playful kisses, one of the wondering children—as ready, however, at least, to share the joy of their young instructress, as to participate in her sorrows. With those last letters came an ivory work-box, an elegant oriental toy, lined with sandal-wood, and fitted up with many compartments, each containing some ingenious nick-nack—some small tool of fairy workmanship fashioned for a lady's hand, or some exquisite essence in its *flacon* of gilded glass. The delight it was to the inquisitive children to pry, over and over again, into every drawer and compartment in this beautiful box! And Blanche was too sweet-tempered to refuse the often-asked indulgence; only she watched with jealous care, lest their little, busy fingers should unwittingly injure any part of the delicate workmanship; and if Miss Crawfurd was present, she resisted, with evident annoyance, their importunities to be allowed to take out of a cunning, secret drawer, (which had not long remained secret for them,) two beautiful, little pictures—"so beautiful!" they said; "and one so like Ma'amselle!"—That one was her brother's miniature; and when they asked her, if she did not love him dearly for sending her such a fine present, she smiled and blushed, and simply answered, that she did indeed dearly love him. The little girls were not long in discovering, moreover, that the return of this dear brother had been announced in his last letter. The regiment was recalled to Europe, and he wrote on the eve of embarkation.

No wonder that, on the evening of that day which had brought her such blissful tidings, the fair face of Blanche was radiant with such a glow of happiness as to attract

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even the passing notice of Mrs. L——, and the more benevolent observation of her husband, as their young inmate with her pupils modestly approached the awful verge of her drawing-room circle. The exuberant gladness of her heart was longing to communicate and diffuse itself; and the look and tone of almost affectionate filial confidence with which she replied to Mr. L——'s accustomed salutation, was so irresistibly winning, that it drew from him another and another sentence, till at last he found himself chatting with her, almost with the affectionate familiarity of a father, and had actually gone the length of calling her "My dear!" without being conscious how insidiously the natural kindliness of his nature had encroached on that dignified condescension to which he conceived it proper to confide all manifestations of good-will towards his daughters' governess.

Mademoiselle D'Albi's continuance in the evening circle, or rather in its *outworks*, was usually restricted to the space of half an hour, while the tea and coffee were carried round, and till the bed-time of her pupils, when, with a silent curtsy, she left the drawing-room with them, and having accompanied them to their apartments, joyfully retired to the unmolested quiet of her own. But it sometimes happened that Mrs. L——'s party being enlivened by the accession of several young persons, music and quadrilles became the order of the evening. At such times the talents of Blanche were put in requisition, and she was detained to play for the benefit of the dancers, whose enjoyment was enhanced in no trifling degree by the spirit and correctness of the musician, and by the variety of beautiful airs in which she was a proficient. Poor Blanche! how often, in the days that were gone, had she tripped it to those very measures—the admired of all eyes, and the beloved of all hearts—amongst the lovely and beloved, the happy band of her young companions! It was wonderful (with all those recollections in her heart) how she could sit before that instrument, looking so patient and contented, playing an hour after hour with such unerring touch, and unflagging spirit! Yes—there she sat, regardless and disregarded of every creature in the gay as-

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semblage—unless it were that every now and then some gentleman of the party stole a furtive glance of admiration at the lovely foreigner, inwardly desirous, maybe, that he could exchange his sprawling, bounding partner, with all her newly-imported Parisian graces and frippery clumsily tacked upon English awkwardness, for that young sylph-like creature, so elegant in her unadorned simplicity; for Blanche, still in mourning for her parents, wore a plain black robe; and a profusion of soft, fair, silky ringlets, one thick glossy braid encircling and confining them like a diadem, were the only decorations of a head remarkable for its classical beauty, and the peculiar gracefulness of carriage which was its characteristic expression.

Sometimes also a pair of misses would saunter towards her during the intervals of the dance, and drawl out a few words of inquiry about some fashionable air; while their eyes were busily engaged in taking notes of the becoming manner in which her hair was arranged, and of the foreign *tournure* of her sable dress.

It so happened, that on the very evening when the heart of Blanche was overflowing with its secret hoard of gladness —oh, how long had that poor heart been a stranger to such blissful feelings!—Mrs. L——'s circle was a large and gay one, and a proposal to form quadrilles being suddenly made, and as promptly acceded to, Mademoiselle was detained to take her patient sitting at the pianoforte. She had always acceded with willing sweetness to similar requisitions; but this evening she sat down to the instrument with even joyous readiness, and the exuberance of her happiness found expression in such sprightly measures, that her flying fingers soon outstripped the common time of the dancers, and many breathless calls for moderation were sent towards her from the scampering and despairing performers. Then would she laugh and blush, and shake her head in playful self-reproach at her own lawless performance, and for a while—a very little while—the restless fingers were restrained to slower movements; once or twice she looked towards the dancers as if with a vehement longing to spring up and mingle in their gay evolutions, but those glances were mo-

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mentary, and her eyes dropped again upon the ivory keys; but such a smiling and half-exulting playfulness lurked about her mouth, as if she were anticipating some hour of future gladness, when she should join hands once more in the merry dance with the companions of her youth, on the earth —the lovely green sward of her own dear country. Whatever were the fond reveries of poor Blanche, it is certain that her musical task was so unequally performed that evening, as to cause much discomfiture among the dancers, at length despairingly manifested in their relaxing exertions, and in the tedious lounging pauses between the sets.

During one of these, a small knot of gentlemen stood conversing with Mr. L——, close to the pianoforte, on which, mingled with music-books and manuscripts, lay several pamplets and newspapers. One of the gentlemen, carelessly glancing his eye over the miscellaneous heap, caught up a paper with suddenly-excited interest, exclaiming—"Ah! here is already a public account of the melancholy occurrence, of which my letters from Madras make mention." Then rapidly he read aloud the paragraph, which stated that "The regiment de Meuron, being under orders for Europe, had been safely embarked on board the transports provided for its reception, all but the last boat, consisting of the Lieutenant-Colonel, his lady and their family, and two young officers of the regiment, when, by some mismanagement, the boat was suddenly upset in that tremendous surf; and notwithstanding the exertions of the natives on their attending catamarans, every soul perished except the wife and youngest daughter of the Colonel, and *one* of the young officers, Lieutenant D'Albi." Then followed the names of those who had found a watery grave; and the gentleman ran them quickly over, till, just as he had pronounced that of "Horace Vaudreuil," a sudden crash of the piano keys caused a general start, and all eyes turning simultaneously towards the young musician, who had been awaiting the pleasure of the dancers in silence, patient and unnoticed, it was perceived that she had fallen forward on the instrument, her face and arms resting on the keys, and almost hidden by the redundance of fair soft

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ringlets, which had burst in rich disorder from the confining braid.

She was raised up and conveyed to a sofa in a state of deathlike insensibility, from which, after long application of various stimulants, she revived only to relapse into successive faintings. The family apothecary being summoned, by his direction she was conveyed to her chamber and to her bed, and his prognostics were unhappily verified towards morning, when she awoke from a sort of trance, in which she had lain some hours in a high paroxysm of delirious fever. Great was the consternation occasioned in the family of Mr. L—— by this sudden seizure of the young creature, whose personal importance in the establishment, except in relation to the labours of the school-room and the piano, had hitherto been very subordinate to that of Mrs L——'s macaws and Persian cat.

A peculiar horror of all contagious and infectious disorders was amongst the many peculiar horrors to which the sensitive lady of poor Mr. L—— was peculiarly liable. It was in vain that the worthy man himself, having ascertained the decided opinion of the apothecary, again and again assured her that "Mademoiselle's disorder was a brain-fever, which, however likely to terminate fatally, was not of a nature to be communicated even to the attendants of the sick chamber." These assurances, backed by all the apothecary's assertions, were insufficient to allay the lady's *horrors*. "If not *now* infectious, the disorder might become so;" and then *she* was convinced "*all* fevers were catching;" and "if Mr. L—— was so indifferent to *her* safety, *she* could not think of her children and emulate his heroic composure. Not for worlds should they continue in that house two hours longer; and she felt it her duty as a mother to be careful, for *their sakes*, of her own life, and to accompany them from that dangerous spot. It was madness in Mr. L—— to stay there, if *he* would be persuaded;" but Mr. L—— was *not* to be persuaded—so, after conscientiously fulfilling her duty as a wife, by pathetically warning him of the probable consequences of his obstinacy, she bade him farewell with admirable firmness, and after a

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last parting injunction from the carriage-window, to fumigate all letters he might address to her from *that house*, she was driven from the door, and safely and luxuriously lodged before evening at her husband's Richmond villa, with her children and Miss Crawfurd. Great indeed—unspeakably great—"she assured all her friends, was her anxiety on Mr. L——'s account; and they might conceive how agonizing it was to her feelings to leave him in so perilous a situation. Had she followed the dictates of her heart—But those sweet darlings! Could she risk the lives of *both* their parents!" And then tears of sensibility trickled from her eyes at the idea of their orphan state, had she fondly yielded to the temptation of sharing her husband's danger, and fallen a victim to the indulgence of her tender weakness.

Mr. L—— was truly and humanely concerned for the distressing situation of poor Blanche. So young! so fair! so friendless! so utterly dependent now, in her unconscious state, on the mercy and charity of strangers—on the world's cold charity. But there are warm hearts amidst the frozen mass; and all the kindly feelings of Mr. L——'s were now called into action by the affecting circumstances of that helpless being so cast on his benevolence. He was a fond and anxious father; and as the natural thought suggested itself, that, in the vicissitudes of human life, a fate as forlorn as that of the young foreigner might one day be the portion of his own darlings, Mr. L—— inwardly pledged himself to act a parental part by Blanche D'Albi in this hour of her utmost need; and the vow was not less religiously observed because unuttered to mortal ear, and registered in the depths of his own heart. By his order a careful nurse was provided, and a skilful physician called in, when, at the close of the second day from her seizure, Mademoiselle D'Albi was pronounced by the apothecary to be in imminent danger. Dr. M.'s opinion coincided but too perfectly with that of his medical subaltern; and, in spite of their united endeavours to save the interesting young creature intrusted to their care, it soon became evident that the hand of death was on her, and that human art was pow-

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erless to unloose that fatal grasp. Previous to her dissolution, she lay for many days in a state of perfect stupor, far less painful to contemplate than the previous delirium, during which she had talked incessantly with the embodied creatures of her fancy, rambling volubly in her native tongue, and now and then breaking out into snatches of wild song or wilder laughter. But at last that fearful mirth died away in fainter and fainter bursts; and broken syllables and inarticulate sounds succeeded the voluble speech, like dying murmurs of a distant echo; and "then," as the nurse expressed it, "she lay as quiet as a lamb" for many, many days, with eyes half-closed, but not in slumber, or at least only in that slumberous torpor, the gentle harbinger of a more perfect rest.

More than once or twice, or many times, had Mr. L—— visited the sick chamber of poor Blanche, while she lay like a waxen image in that deathlike trance. More than once, as he stood gazing on that fair, pale face, had large tears stolen down his own cheeks—and once, when there was a momentary glimmering of hope—a momentary amendment of pulse—had he caught the hand of the physician with a sudden energy, strangely contrasting his usual habits of formal reserve—exclaiming, "Save her! save her, my dear sir! spare no pains, no cost—a consultation perhaps——" and his agitated voice and incoherent words carried conviction to the heart of the good doctor, that if half the wealth of Mr. L—— could have purchased the life of Blanche D'Albi, he would not have hesitated to make the sacrifice.

But neither care nor skill, nor aught that wealth could command, or kindness lavish, could prolong the days already numbered, or reserve the decree that had gone forth.

Towards the close of the fourteenth day of Blanche's illness, the respiration of the unconscious sufferer became quick and laborious, and Dr. M., whose finger was on her pulse, directed that the curtains of her bed should be drawn aside, and a free current of air admitted through the opened windows. Mr. L—— had entered with the physician, and stationing himself at the bed's foot, stood there with folded arms, and eyes fixed in sad and hopeless contemplation on

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the affecting object before him. Though the eyes of Blanche were more than half veiled by their full, heavy lids, a streak of soft blue was still discernible through the long dark lashes, from whence, however, emanated no spark of intelligence; and far different from the finely blended rose-hues of healthful beauty, was that bright crimson which burned in either cheek. Her head was raised a little from the pillow, by the supporting arm of the nurse, who, with her hand still at liberty, put aside the deep frill of her cap, and the disordered ringlets which had escaped beneath it, that the sweet fresh air might visit with its comforting coolness those throbbing temples, and that burning brow. It was a beautiful, mild, warm April evening, redolent of life and joy, and Nature's renovation; and the pale, golden light of an April sunset penetrated even through a London atmosphere, and amongst a labyrinth of high walls, and blackened roofs, and clustering chimneys, into the very chamber of Blanche; and even to that confined chamber, and over those gloomy precincts, came the soft breath of spring, breathing delicious fragrance, as it was wafted through her open window, over a box of mignonette, coaxed into early blossom by the assiduous cherishing of one who had watched over her miniature garden with the impatient interest of eager childhood.

The balmy air stole gently, gradually into the sick chamber, and between the parted curtains of the bed, as though it were a thing of intelligence, and came gladly on its blessed mission, to convey to the dying Blanche the last soothing sensation she might yet taste on earth—the odorous wafting of her favourite flowers. It came not in vain. As the caressing coolness played over her face, and when it had wandered a few moments amongst the parted ringlets, her quick and laborious breathing became less and less distressing, and at length inhaling one long and deep inspiration, subsided into regular and almost imperceptible respiration, like that of a sleeping infant.

At that moment, there struck up at the farther end of a neighbouring street a strain of wild music, from a band of itinerant musicians—wandering Savoyards. Wild and touching was the strain, as it came mellowed by distance,

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and mingled with the evening breeze. It was "Le Rans des Vaches." To every son and daughter of Helvetia, a spirit-stirring spell, a magic melody, never yet listened to unmoved by any wanderer from her mountain land—only the insensible ear of death, or of the dying . . . . but it seemed as if perception yet lingered in that of Blanche. As the notes of that national air swelled out more and more distinctly, a slight tremor passed over her features, and at last, as if awakening from a deep sleep, her soft blue eyes perfectly unclosed, and glancing upwards towards the female form, on whose bosom her head was pillowed, she murmured in her own native tongue, "Maman! bonne Maman!"

As she uttered those few faltering words, her head sunk lower upon the nurse's breast, and half turning her face inward on that kind pillow, like a weary child, the fair eyelids dropped heavily over those soft blue orbs; but long after their lustre was forever shrouded, and long after the beautiful lips were closed, and the last breath had escaped them in those few touching words, the smile still lingered there with which those words were spoken, as if impressed by the parting rapture of recognition with the Maternal Spirit, permitted possibly to accompany the dark angel on his awful mission, to overcome his terrors by her looks of heavenly welcome, and receiving from his hands the new Celestial, to be its conductress to those abodes of bliss, towards which, even in their day of mortal probation, the pious mother had "trained up her child in the way she should go."

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CHAPTER X.

BROAD SUMMERFORD.

In the churchyard of Broad Summerford—But why should I affect to describe, as from my own recollection, a place with which I am utterly unacquainted except by report? For verily, gentle reader, I never set foot in the said churchyard—neither in the quiet rectory adjoining thereunto—neither in the pretty village wherein they are situated. And yet each and all of those localities are as familiar to my mind's eye, not only as if I had seen them with the bodily organs, but as if I had long sojourned in the parish where they lie. And no wonder; for all those places were described to me at that season of life when imagination, like a cloudless mirror, reflects back every object presented before it with the faithfulness of truth, and the tablets of memory receive those *proof-impressions*, compared with which, the most perfect struck off in later years are faint and spiritless. Besides, the describer was one rich in old tales, and family legends, and all sorts of traditionary lore; one whom I could interrupt and question, with all the confidence of perfect familiarity, and the impetuous curiosity of youthful eagerness; and many a fire-light hour have I sat on the low footstool at her feet, listening to stories of past times, and departed generations, and scenes and places associated therewith, so graphically combined, that the illusion was perfect; and often, in after-life, I have caught myself speaking to others of those places, persons, and circumstances, as if I had been contemporaneous with the former, and familiar with the latter, from personal observation and experience. Delightful season! delicious hours! ineffaceable recollections! never to be superseded among the heart's most precious records, by any after-enjoyment, however exquisite!

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Far other scenes have I mingled in since then—far other interests have excited—far other feelings have engrossed me; but, in weal and in woe—in cloud and in sunshine—in tumult and in silence—in crowds and in solitude—often, often have I looked back with a sickening heart, a yearning tenderness, a bitter joy, to those quiet hours, when my all of earthly good—my world of felicity—was comprised in such little space—within the walls of that old-fashioned parlour, where the fire-light flashed broad and bright on the warm damask curtains, and I sat on that low footstool by the hearth, at the feet of one who never tired of telling those tales of other days, which I was never weary of listening to. Hers was the true graphic art of story-telling. Her portraits lived and breathed; and, while I hung upon her words with mute attention, the long procession of generations gone, passed before me—not shadowy phantoms, but substantial forms—defined realities—distinguished, each from each, by every nice modification of characteristic peculiarity—uncles, aunts and cousins, (a bewigged and brocaded host!) of whom most had been gathered, before my birth, to the sepulchre of their fathers, and the remaining few had lived to bestow a patriarchal blessing on their infant descendant. All these, recalled to earth by the enchanted wand, were made to re-act their former parts on the great stage for my especial pleasure; and I became as familiar with the names, characters, and persons of those departed worthies, as she who really remembered their times, and had been herself the youthful darling of their latter days.

Among those she best loved to speak of was a kind and gentle pair—an old bachelor, and his twin maiden sister, of the name of Seale—relations of my grandmother, who lived out together their long and blameless lives,

"The world forgetting, by the world forgot,"

in an obscure, quiet village of Somersetshire, called Broad Summerford, of which parish Mr. Seale was the revered and faithful pastor for the space of more than half a century.

"They were the best people in the world," said my dear

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chronicler; "and some of the happiest days of my early youth were spent at the pleasant rectory of Broad Summerford. Our good relations had heard that my parents were suffering considerable anxiety on my account—my health having become so delicate as to indicate symptoms of decline—and that change of air and scene had been medically prescribed for me. The kind souls knew that my father and mother could not remove from the small country town where circumstances had fixed their residence, without very serious inconvenience, and, in the benevolence of their hearts, they forthwith dispatched an epistle, requesting that their dear cousins would intrust the precious child to their safe keeping, and to the pure air and rural change of their pastoral habitation, for as long a time as they could spare her from the paternal roof, or till her health should be perfectly re-established, which they almost pledged themselves (with God's blessing) it would be in their salubrious village. Such an invitation from such inviters was most gladly and gratefully accepted. My father accompanied me half-way to Broad Summerford, when he consigned me to the care of a grave, respectable-looking person, Mr. Seale's confidential servant, who was sent with his master's equipage, (a dark-green calash, drawn by a steady, powerful old mare, whose sleek coat and broad back might have vied with those perfections of a London dray-horse,) to receive and escort me to the rectory. John Somers himself was clad in a suit of sober pepper-and-salt, the decent and becoming livery of his reverend master, in whose service he had grown grey, and been advanced, by long-tried worth and affection, something beyond the station of a mere domestic. The kind and considerate creature did his best to beguile me of my natural grief at parting with my father, for the first time in my short life of fourteen years. He pointed out to me all the most remarkable objects on our road—all the hamlets, noblemen's and gentlemen's seats; and, as he had been born and bred in the county, his topographical information was enriched with store of anecdotes respecting the owners of all those goodly mansions. But as we approached Broad Summerford, all his descriptive zeal merged in that favour-

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ite spot; and ever and anon it was, "Now, Miss! you're only four miles from the rectory;" and then, "that's Squire R.'s house, miss—a special friend of master's;"—and, "now you're only two miles from the rectory—and there's the mill where our wheat is ground—sweet home-made bread you'll taste at Broad Summerford, miss!—and now it's only one mile—half a one. There's master's upper glebe-land—and there's our folks and horses getting in the hay. Ay, old Joan and I should hardly have been spared just now for any thing but to fetch you, miss—but you're come to Broad Summerford in a pleasant time. Now we're a'top of the last hill.—And there! there! look down to your right, miss—Don't you see that great stack of old chimneys all over ivy, and those two grey gables?—That's the rectory, God bless it—and there's the dovecot, and the homecroft, that old Joan has all to herself—a lazy jade—and now we shall be round at the front gate in half a minute." And, as John Somers said, a short sweep brought us within that time in front of the rectory, at the fore-court gate of which stood its venerable master, in hospitable readiness to receive and welcome his expected guest. He was indeed a man of most venerable aspect—of tall and large stature, but something bowed by years, with a pale, placid, almost unwrinkled countenance, though the dim and faded lustre of his mild blue eyes betokened his advanced age, even more than the perfectly white hair, which, encircling his bald crown, descended even to his shoulders in still redundant waves of silky softness. The old man was standing with both hands crossed before him on the top of a thick knotted staff, and the attitude happily combining with his orthodox attire, the short cassock and apron became him with a sort of apostolic dignity. As the calash drew up to the gate, Mr. Seale laid aside his staff, and, coming forward, welcomed me with a look and voice of almost paternal kindness; and though faithful John was already by the side of the vehicle to help me down, his master chose to perform that first hospitable office, and, lifting me out in his feeble arms, (I was a small delicate girl—quite a child in appearance,) said, "Welcome to Broad Summerford, my dear little cousin. May God

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bless this meeting to us all!" And with that affectionate and pious greeting, he half-led, half-carried me to the house-door, where, on the uppermost of the four broad steps which led to it, stood another aged welcomer, who tenderly reiterated her brother's Christian salutation, and sealed it with a maternal kiss, as she gently drew me to her kind bosom. And so in a moment the little wanderer was at home again —transported but from one home to another—from the arms of tender parents to those which encircled her almost as fondly.

Mrs. Helen Seale was the very personification of beautiful old age. A fairy creature she was—almost diminutive of stature—but her person in youth had been most delicately and symmetrically moulded; and in her old age it still retained much of its fair proportion, and all its native gracefulness. Her hands and arms were still beautiful! The taper fingers and soft palms were yet tinged with that delicate pink, which still mantled like a maiden blush over a face where Time had set his seal indeed, but, as it should seem, reluctantly, as if the ruthless spoiler had half relented for once in his destructive work. Her eyes were blue, like her brother's, (the brother and sister were indeed twins in mind and feature,) but their mild lustre was almost unimpaired; and the soft hair that was combed in glossy smoothness over the roll, under her clear lawn cap, was but silvered here and there among its pale-brown waviness. No snow was ever whiter—no cobweb was ever finer than that same clear lawn of which Mrs. Helen's cap, kerchief, ruffles, and apron were invariably composed; and the latter was spread out in unrumpled purity over a richly quilted petticoat of silver grey silk, and a gown of the same material, abounding in such depth and amplitude of fold as would have furnished out a dozen modern draperies. A narrow black velvet collar encircled her small fair throat, (down which, as is related of fair Rosamond, I used to think one might see the red wine flow,) and the precise neck-kerchief was fastened with a fine diamond-pin. The fashion of this raiment was never varied by season or circumstance, except that, regularly on the thirty-first of October, the rich

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lustring was exchanged for a richer satin of the same colour; a black lace handkerchief was superadded to that of snowy lawn, and a pair of black velvet mittens, turned down with white satin, were drawn over the delicate hands and arms, not to be discarded till the thirty-first of May drew forth the silvery lustring from its retirement of lavender and roses, and consigned the warm satin to a five months' seclusion.

It was marvellous to observe how Mrs. Helen kept herself *in print* as she did! From morning to night, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year, always the same—always "*mise à quatres épingles*," as if she had just stepped out of a bandbox; the silk or satin unchanging in hue or freshness—its lawn accompaniments never contracting soil or wrinkle on their snowy smoothness—the neck-kerchief folded in exactly the same number of plaits by the careful hand of that ancient abigail Mrs. Betty, who would probably have been as much *deroutée* by any innovation of those laws of the Medes and Persians, as if her venerable mistress had commanded a ball-dress or a wedding-suit. Yes—one would have thought that the dear old lady had been kept in a bandbox all ready for company, if her whole course of life had not, in fact, been one of most active, though quiet usefulness—for Mrs. Helen was never in a bustle. Neither was she uncomfortably precise about the preservation of this invariable neatness. Nay, I have seen the old grey parrot on her wrist or her shoulder, and the favourite tortoise-shell cat on her lap, often and often; and the old lady took snuff too, and, spite of all, the unruffled purity of attire remained inviolate. The matter was a mystery to me, whose whole girlish life had hitherto been an outrage to the laws of tidiness.

But I must tell you something more of my first evening at Summerford Rectory. It was already evening, you remember, when I arrived there—about seven o'clock of a sweet June evening, when the old green calash drove up to the entrance court, and my venerable cousin lifted me down within its quiet precincts. The entrance gate was of filigree iron-work, breast high, between two low stone pil-

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lars, crowned with balls, but the walls were all evergreen—beautiful holly hedges, as finely kept as ever those at Sayes Court could have been in their day of perfection. This living wall, opening to the right and left in two bowery archways, leading to the offices and garden, formed three sides of the square court, the old mansion itself completing the fourth boundary—a very antique dwelling, with quarter-work of red brick, mellowed by time and weather to the richest and most harmonious colouring. The double gable (the same John Somers had pointed out to me from the hill-top) was surmounted on each pinnacle by stone balls similar to those on the entrance pillars. One was quite wound and matted over with ivy, of which only a few encroaching tendrils had as yet curled round the other ball; but lower down a fine apricot covered a considerable portion of the wall with its skilfully trained branches; and a lovely honeysuckle (then in full bloom) had been allowed to occupy the remaining space, and almost to darken some of the windows with its picturesque festoons. The latticed windows were set deep in heavy stone framework, and the massy doorway opened from a flight of four broad steps, on the uppermost of which, on either side, stood two tubs containing fine orange-trees. And there, as I told you, in the doorway between those two fragrant supporters, stood the dear old lady; and after I had received the welcome of her gentle embrace, the brother and sister, taking each a hand, led me between them, through an airy entrance hall, into a small but lofty antiroom, hung round with family portraits, and from thence into a large pleasant parlour, the common sitting room. A very pleasant cheerful room it was, with a fine wide bay window opposite the entrance, and on one side a sashed door, then standing open to a broad gravel walk, bordered on either side by beds of the choicest and sweetest flowers. The apartment contained no costly furniture, except a fine Indian folding screen of many leaves, and a valuable Japan cabinet, loaded with rare old china. The curtains were composed of white dimity, as well as the *short petticoats* of the settee and chairs. Those odd little chairs! Methinks I see them now, with their oval backs,

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sloping down like falling shoulders into little fin-like arms, spread out with such an air of tender invitation! And they held out no false promise. Modern luxury, *recherché* as it is, has nothing half so comfortable among all its *traps* for loungers. I was soon placed in one of those delightful *fauteuils* by the side of my kind hostess, who established herself before the tea equipage, all ready set on a small Pembroke table near the beautiful bay window. My travelling guardian, John Somers, (jealous of devolving upon others any of his accustomed services,) soon appeared with the silver-chased tea-kettle and lamp, which he set down on a small mahogany tripod, beside his venerable lady; and it was pleasant to observe the almost reverential gratitude with which the faithful servant replied to the kind greeting of his aged mistress, and her thanks "for having brought their dear young cousin safe to Summerford rectory."

The usual tea hour was long past on the evening of my arrival; but for once the clockwork regularity of established custom was infringed, in kind consideration for the expected guest; and Mrs. Helen, anticipating that "the poor child would be half famished," had taken care that the tea-table should be far more abundantly provided than with the four slices of wafer bread and butter, its customary allotment. In truth, the dear old lady had calculated with great foresight; for I did such ample justice to her plain seed-cake, and made such consumption of her sweet home-made bread and butter, as must have infinitely relieved any apprehension she might have conceived at the first sight of the poor little sickly creature of whom she had so benevolently taken charge. But, in fact, it *must* have been that the air of Broad Summerford wrought miracles. At home, for many preceding weeks, I had almost loathed the sight of food.

Mr. Seale and Mrs. Helen soon drew me into familiar conversation; and, by the time tea was over, I was prattling away to them with as much unrestraint as if I had been domesticated under their roof for a twelvemonth. But even before the tea equipage was removed, this excitement of animal spirits began to sink under bodily languor and extreme fatigue; my eyelids fell involuntarily, and the sentence I

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was uttering died away in an inarticulate manner as my head dropt aside against Mrs. Helen's shoulder. Half roused, however, by the gentle contact, I was just sensible that a kind arm encircled me, and a tender kiss was imprinted on my forehead, that something was said about ringing for Betty, for that "the poor dear child could not sit up to prayers;" and then the bell was pulled, (with what extraordinary acuteness the sound of a bell tingles in one's ears in that state of half slumber!) and Mrs. Betty summoned; and between her and her mistress I was somehow, with little exertion of my own, conducted up stairs into a bedchamber, undressed, and put to bed in a state of the most passive helplessness—unconsciousness wellnigh, except that I was still exquisitely sensible of the luxury of sinking down on the soft pillow between the smooth fine sheets, that smelled deliciously of lavender and roses.

I recollect nothing more till the next morning, (my eleven hours' nap had been a dreamless spell,) when I unclosed my eyes to the light of a bright summer sun, which streamed in between the white curtains of my bed, and to the emulative brightness and summer sunshine of Mrs. Betty's comely countenance, who having looked over and arranged my wardrobe, and prepared every thing for my levee, stood waiting in patient silence the natural termination of my unconscionable slumber, from which her gentle mistress, who had already looked in on me from her adjoining dressing-room, had prohibited all attempt to waken me. "Let the poor dear have her sleep out," said the kind lady; and there stood Mrs. Betty a statue of silent obedience.

At last, however, when it pleased me to awaken, that portly handmaid saluted me with a pleasant good-morrow, and the information, that if I pleased to rise and dress directly, I should still be in time for prayers, and "Master and Mistress's breakfast." So, between my own alacrity and her assistance, I was soon ready; and then she showed me down to that large, pleasant sitting-room, from which, indeed, I had ascended the preceding evening, but in such a slumberous state, as to leave me no recollection of the way. Breakfast was ready laid, and Mrs. Helen had just preceded

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me into the room, where sat her venerable brother, at the head of the breakfast-table, with the Bible open before him, in which he was marking out the morning chapters.

Both my kind cousins greeted me with cordial affection; and Mr. Seale, calling me towards him, while his sister rang the summons to their little household, said, "Come, and take your place by me, my dear child. I think, after to-day, I shall appoint you my clerk, for I know your good father has well qualified you for the office."

Proud and happy girl was I to take my station beside that good old man, and on the morrow to assume my allotted office; and though my voice faltered a little at the first responses, my father had made me a correct and articulate reader; and from that day forth I officiated, to the entire satisfaction of my indulgent hearers, and with a very tolerable proportion of self-approval.

Soon after breakfast, Mrs. Helen took me with her through all the household departments, in every one of which good order and beautiful neatness shone apparent. Five servants composed the in-door establishment. Mr. John and Mrs. Betty having authority over the *corps de cuisine*, under the mild control of the higher powers; for Mrs. Helen, though reposing perfect confidence in her old and faithful servants, took an active share in the family arrangements, and no little pride indeed, in all the more refined and complex culinary arts—such as pickling, preserving, making wines and cordials, sweet waters and strong waters, pastry, and floating islands, and confectionary hedgehogs. In all the mysteries of distilling, the dear old lady was an adept. Rose, peach, almond, and orange-flower, pennyroyal and peppermint waters, were ranged rank and file, in long-necked, squat bottles, on the still-room shelves, sufficient in quantity to flavour all the confectionary, and cure all the stomach-aches, in England. I believe, indeed, Mrs. Helen did supply half the country; so great was the reputation of her odoriferous stores, and so liberal her distribution of them. Certain it is, that the annual replenishment of the stock was considered as much a matter of course by the lady and her assistant handmaid, as the summer reproduction of the grey lustring,

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and its accompaniments; but why, or on what principle Mrs. Helen conceived it equally indispensable to concoct a certain yearly quantity of plague water, I was never fully satisfied; nor, indeed, did it ever come within my knowledge, that there were any applicants for that invaluable elixir, made after the recipe of "our late Queen, Henrietta Maria, of blessed memory," as set forth in crabbed tawny characters, in the old family receipt-book; neither could I ever precisely ascertain, (though I had my own surmises on the subject,) what became of the quantity which periodically disappeared from the shelf, to be replaced by a fresh concoction.

It were endless to enumerate the palsy-waters, balsams, tinctures, elixirs, electuaries, which occupied one department of the still-room, and almost profane to reveal the mysteries of that sacred chamber during the season of concoctions—mysteries as jealously guarded as those of the Bona Dea from the eyes of the uninitiated and ignorant.

In after-days of complete naturalization in the family, I was privileged with *les grandes et petites entrées*, even of that generally prohibited closet; and great was my delight in accompanying thither my venerable cousin, when her occupation lay within the spicery or confectionary region, and in receiving her instructions in the arts she excelled in—those always excepted which related to the medicinal department; for, to my shame be it spoken, I derived infinitely more gratification from the pastime of sticking over blanc-mange hedge-hogs with almond bristles, than in compounding the most infallible ointment; nor could I, with all deference to Mrs. Helen's superior wisdom, ever go the length of agreeing that her tincture of rhubarb was to the full as palatable as her fine, old, raisin wine, and her walnuts, preserved with sugar and senna, equally delicious with those guiltless of the latter ingredient.

Among the various concerns transacted in that notable chamber, one of the most important, that of breaking up the loaves of double-refined sugar, was always superintended by Mrs. Helen; and on those occasions, with a fine cambric handkerchief pinned on over her clear lawn apron,

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she assumed even an active share in the operation; and I used to delight in watching the lady-like manner with which the clumsy nippers were managed by her pretty, little, pink fingers, and the quiet dexterity which supplied their deficiency of muscular strength. If Mrs. Helen Seale had chosen, by way of variety, to twirl a mop, or handle a carpet-broom, she must have done it with the air and grace of a perfect gentlewoman.

But you are impatient to know more of my first day at Summerford Rectory. It was full of delightful incident to me, though little or nothing to make a story out of. I have told you how Mrs. Helen took me her morning round through the still-room, the housekeeper's room, and various offices; and then we visited the dairy.—Such a dairy!—such a paradise of milk, and cream, and butter, and curds, and whey, and cream cheeses, and crystal water, and purity, and fragrance!—for many bouquets of the sweetest flowers were dispersed among the glossy milk pans, and round the shallow reservoir of a marble slab in the centre of the octagon building; on the polished surface of which, butter-pats, of many a fantastic shape, were curiously arranged, half floated by a constant supply of the purest and coldest water, conveyed thither from a neighbouring spring. From the dairy we passed into the poultry-yard; and there I was introduced to a train of milk-white turkeys, and fowls of the same colour, a few bantams, and three galenies, Mrs. Helen's especial favourites, though the perverse creatures could never be brought to submit to any of the regulations of the feathered establishment, straying away over pales, walls, roofs, and barriers of every description, scratching up seed-beds and flower-borders, to the despair of the gardener, and laying their eggs on those, or on the bare gravel-walk, in flagrant dereliction of all fitness and propriety.

Yet those irreclaimables were, as I told you, prime favourites with their order-loving mistress; and I, who partook in some measure of their wild, and wandering, and untameable nature, very shortly became the object of her tender and unbounded indulgence; though the dear lady's nice sense of decorum, and habitual placidity, were frequently

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startled into a gesture of amazement, and a hasty exclamation, at sight of her *elève* swinging on the orchard gate—scrambling, like a cat, along the top of the garden wall—coming in knee-deep in mud, with a lap full of cresses from the water-meadow, or with a frock torn to tatters, in some lawless excursion over hedges and hurdles, when, as dear Mrs. Helen mildly assured me, "the common roadway was so much shorter and pleasanter."

It was some time, indeed, before I astounded the decorous inhabitants of the rectory with these feats of prowess. On my first arrival, I was far too weak and languid for such performances, even if I had not been restrained a while by natural shyness. But that soon yielded to the affectionate encouragement of my kind hosts; and in a month's time, the pure air of Broad Summerford—gentle exercise in the old calash, in which Mr. Seale took me a daily airing—simple but nourishing diet, and asses' milk, had so effectually restored my health, that my natural exuberance of animal spirits began to manifest itself, by the indications aforesaid, somewhat to the consternation of Mrs. Helen, though she could not find in her heart to repress "the fine spirits of the poor dear child, so wonderfully recovered (under God's blessing) by Summerford air, and her good management."

So much for one "night's entertainment," as I have faithfully recorded it, from the well-remembered words of my dear historian. *She* shall resume the narrative in an ensuing chapter, for the benefit of all those who have patience with a subject which has neither invention, magic, adventure, sentiment, eccentricity, passion, love, murder, or metaphysics, to recommend it—only TRUTH.

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CHAPTER XI.

BROAD SUMMERFORD.

The history of one day at the rectory was an epitome of all; and yet there was no monotony, no dulness, no gloom, no heavy flight of time, in that dear mansion. I never knew a tedious hour, during my long sojourn of a full twelvemonth, within its hospitable walls; and yet I had no companions of my own age—nor any indeed, except my two venerable relations, and the four-footed and feathered creatures, with whom I was always sure to contract speedy and familiar intimacy.

In the morning I generally attended Mrs. Seale in all her home avocations, and, when they were dispatched, not unfrequently accompanied her on a round of charitable visits in the adjoining village. Those early hours were usually passed by Mr. Seale in his study; and notwithstanding my vagabond propensities, I would not have forfeited the privilege of being allowed to read with him one daily hour in that pleasant, quiet room, (made deliciously sombre by the shade of a huge old jessamine which embowered the large bay window,) for all the temptations which lay in wait for me in garden, copse, or meadow. I have ever since delighted in the smell of jessamine and Russia leather, (strange association!) because it immediately brings that dear, old-fashioned room, and its revered occupant, vividly before my mind's eye.

We dined at two o'clock; and, after a short nap in his great, high-backed armed-chair, Mr. Seale generally sallied forth on what he was wont to term his evening rounds through the hamlet, and among the more scattered and remote dwellings of his large parish—in every one of which he was a visiter, not less frequent than welcome and re-

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spected. He had a word in season for all: Of comfort—of encouragement—of advice—of consolation—of remonstrance—of rebuke also, when occasion called for it; and never did the good man (whatever pain it cost him) shrink behind motives of false humanity, from the strict performance of that imperative duty. Nor were the severe truths he uttered less awfully impressive, because it was well known and felt, by every individual of his flock, that their benevolent pastor loved far better to dwell on the promises of the Gospel than on its terrible denunciations.

But Mr. Seale administered not only to the spiritual wants of his parishioners; he also cared tenderly for their temporal necessities; and having considerable knowledge of medicine, and being "intrusted," as he termed it, with a competent income, his means of doing good were manifold, and they were improved to the uttermost. Happy and proud was I when the good old man, refreshed by his short siesta, entered the drawing-room with his hat on, his staff in hand, (just such a one, methinks, as Bishop Jewell's*

* "As soon as he (Mr. Hooker) was perfectly recovered from this sickness, he took a journey from Oxford to Exeter, to satisfy and see his good mother, being accompanied by a countryman, and companion of his own college, and both on foot, which was then either more in fashion, or want of money, or their humility, made it so: But on foot they went, and took Salisbury in their way, purposely to see the good Bishop, (Jewell,) who made Mr. Hooker and his companion dine with him at his own table; which Mr. Hooker boasted of with much joy and gratitude when he saw his mother and his friends. And at the Bishop's parting with him, the Bishop gave him good counsel, and his benediction, but forgot to give him money; which, when the Bishop had considered, he sent a servant in all haste to call Richard back to him; and at Richard's return, the Bishop said to him, 'Richard, I sent for you back, to lend you a horse which hath carried me many a mile, and, I thank God, with much ease;' and presently delivered to him a walking staff, with which he professed he had travelled through many parts of Germany. And he said, 'Richard, I do not give, but lend you my horse: Be sure you be honest, and bring my horse back to me at your return this way to Oxford. And I do now give you ten groats to bear your charges to Exeter; and here is ten groats more, which I charge you to deliver to your mother; and tell her, I send her a bishop's benediction with it, and beg the continuance of her prayers for me: And if you bring my horse back to me, I will give you ten groats more, to carry you on foot to the college. And so God bless you, good Richard.'"

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trusty steed,) and a small basket containing medicines and cordials, which, with a smile of invitation, he invited his "little apprentice," as he called me, to carry for the old Doctor.

Happy and proud was I to obey that cheerful summons; and powerful as were the attractions of meadow rambles, swinging upon gates, and scrambling over hedges and ditches, I was not to be lured abroad by any of those refined pastimes, while a chance existed, that, by sitting quietly beside Mrs. Helen's embroidery-frame, I should be called upon to accompany the rector in his pastoral progress. Dear Mrs. Helen never walked further than that part of the scattered hamlet immediately adjoining the rectory domain. I cannot fancy *she* could ever have taken a *good long walk*, as it is called. That small fine frame of hers, though perfectly organized, was surely composed of materials too delicate for robust exercise. Those little, little feet, looked as if they had never moved but on Persian carpets, or velvet grass-plats. They would hardly have disgraced a Chinese lady; and among the curiosities contained in the Indian cabinet, was an embroidered Chinese shoe, that did not match amiss with her little black velvet slipper. I used to call her the "Fairy Graciosa."

Our tea-time was six o'clock. In summer, the after-hours of daylight were commonly spent in a large, pleasant alcove, terminating the broad garden-walk, to which Mrs. Helen's footstool, her carpet-work, or tambour-frame, were duly conveyed by John Somers. Then Mr. Seale busied himself about his flower-borders, and I assisted him in the agreeable task so much to his satisfaction, that he was wont to call me his "neat-handed Phillis;" and after some apprenticeship in the initiatory care of sweet-williams, clove pinks, and some such second-rate beauties, I was preferred to the high responsibility of securing the full buds of the rarest carnations, against the danger of premature and irregular bursting, and of tending and even watering the delicate auriculas, more sedulously guarded from every caprice of the elements than ever was Eastern princess, "the light of the Harem." If any weeds of vanity lurked in the good man's

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heart, they sprung surely from his passion for those favourite flowers; and I have seen him stand for ten minutes at a time, entranced in admiration of a "Lovely Helen," or a "Powdered Beau!"

Those were verily right pleasant hours, when I followed my dear master from flower to flower, with the small green watering-pot, the slender sticks, and nicely shredded strings of fine wet bass. To this day, when busied in my own garden I have occasion to use the latter material, its peculiar smell gives me a strange, indescribable pleasure; so strongly and invariably does it bring to my recollection that sweet garden of Broad Summerford rectory, and my two dear and indulgent companions.

John Somers and twilight came together; the former to re-convey to the house Mrs. Helen's footstool and working apparatus; the latter gently intimating to the venerable pair, that it was time for aged heads to seek shelter from the falling dews. It was very pleasing to observe the old-fashioned politeness and tender caution, with which Mr. Seale supported on his own feeble arm the more infirm frame of his beloved companion, as they slowly retraced the flower-bordered walk towards their quiet dwelling, holding "sweet converse" by the way, and lingering often—now in mutual admiration of some half-opened, dew-glittering rose—or to watch the antic circles of the bat—or to gaze upon the evening star—or to catch the last mellow notes of the blackbird's vesper hymn, or the deeper tone of the curfew from the neighbouring steeple. And if it was a moonlight evening, candles were not soon called for, on their re-entering the parlour. The old couple dearly loved to sit together at that beautiful bay window, in meditative and social—yes—*social* silence, contemplating the glorious uprising of the broad full moon, or the silvery brightness of her growing crescent, emerging from behind the dark mass of the old church tower, and "its embowering elms." Solemn and pleasant, doubtless, at such seasons, were the thoughts of those kindred hearts.

Theirs, whose earthly race was so nearly run—whose hopes tended to the same goal—whose innocent lives had

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flown on in the same peaceful channel—and who trusted not to be divided in their deaths :—surely, though "speech nor language" were at such times interchanged, their hearts communed with each other, and with good spirits, ascending and descending from those starry heavens whereunto their aged eyes were so devoutly uplifted. Young and volatile as I was, I should have felt it little less than sacrilegious to interrupt that sacred silence. I too loved well to sit silent and unobserved in my dark corner, contemplating, with affectionate reverence, that beautiful picture of happy old age.

As the days shortened, we had some reading in the evening :—History, sacred and profane—Voyages—Travels—Biography—and Sir Charles Grandison.—And Mr. Seale and Mrs. Helen often played a match at backgammon before supper. That was brought in at half-past nine precisely ; and soon after ten the Christian household once more re-assembled round their reverend and revered master, to conclude the day as they had commenced it, with thanksgiving, prayer, and adoration.

Such was the history of one day at Broad Summerford. And I have already told you, that one was the epitome of all, with very slight variations—such as the occasional calls of friends or neighbours ; for though the aged lady of the rectory paid no visits herself, many courted and sought her society, ever sure of a kind and cordial welcome. And Mr. Seale now and then brought home a dinner guest unceremoniously invited in his morning ramble ; and once or twice in the year, Mrs. Helen collected together a rather numerous evening assembly, formally convened at a fortnight's notice, by regular invitation cards, to obtain which there was as much emulation (though certainly less intriguing) as if the dear old lady had been a distinguished leader of *haut ton*, and her party the first opening of a fashionable campaign. And in the surrounding neighbourhood of Broad Summerford, there was no lack of the great, the gay, and the fashionable ; and yet none but thought themselves honoured by an invitation to the rectory. Perhaps, too, the mere charm of novelty had its full share of attrac-

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tion for some of those modish guests, whose habitual listlessness might have found a temporary interest and excitement in the strong contrast opposed by the warm-hearted simplicity within those quiet walls, to the artificial heartlessness which characterized their own circles.

Be that as it may, it rarely happened that any answer but a ready acceptance was returned for one of Mrs. Helen's invitation cards; and the party, once invited and arranged, then sounded great note of preparation. And then was Mrs. Betty in her glory! to say nothing of her less bustling and important, though not less active lady. Then began such compounding of seed-cakes, and pound-cakes, and plain-cakes, and wafers, and crumpets, and all sorts of indescribable accompaniments, as might have set out half a dozen confectioners' shops. And then—for those were the good old times of suppers, and hot suppers—there was such stuffing of turkey poults—such larding of capons—such collaring of eels—such potting of savoury meats—such whipping of syllabubs—such spinning of sugar—such powdering with comfits—such devices, and surprises, and "subtleties," (almond hedgehogs, and floating islands included,) as Mrs. Glass herself might have been proud to have had a hand in.

During that whole week of preparation, the approach to the rectory was like that to one of the Spice islands. All round the house, the perfume of lilacs and seringas (if they were in flower) was fairly overpowered by the exotic odours of mace and cinnamon; and I used to conceit—*dans mon petit moi-même*—that the persons of Mrs. Helen and her faithful Betty must have been half embalmed, by the time their labours were over in that nest of spicery.

You are not, however, to infer, that the quiet and elegant routine of domestic regulations was at all infringed upon by these extraneous proceedings; that any thing like vulgar bustle, or *parvenu* anxiety, marked the grand reception-day; or that Mrs. Helen's serene self-possession was in any way affected by the expectation or arrival of her guests. She was too perfectly the gentlewoman to feel any such underbred trepidations; and her true politeness—the courtesy of the heart—gave to her whole deportment such natural grace-

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fulness, as could never have been imparted by the finest artificial polish. Besides, every thing was in good taste, and in perfect keeping, throughout the whole modest establishment. No attempt—no pretension—no display—no cold best rooms, to be thrown open for its one grand day of annual exhibition—no sumptuous carpets to be uncovered—no cold, glazy cushions to be uncased—no costly gilding to be unpapered—no swathed-up curtains to be unswathed—no ornamental trumpery to be arranged with elaborate carelessness—no unusual decoration to be remarked in the large, comfortable, constantly-used drawing-room, except that the green dragon beau-pots were filled with some of Mr. Seale's choicest flowers, never cut by the dear old man but on such special occasions—ostensibly as an offering to Mrs. Helen; but having hinted as his besetting sin—his floral vanity—I may just venture the surmise, that his liberality was not purely disinterested, and that a cynical eye might have detected original sin in the delight which beamed in his mild countenance, when the beautiful bouquets, near which he was sure to post himself, drew forth admiring exclamations from the courteous by-standers, and humble petitions for slips and cuttings at the proper season.

Nothing could exceed the tone of elegant propriety—of perfect respectability—which pervaded the whole establishment. Old John Somers, with his silvery hair, and suit of sober grey, followed by his attendant page in the same livery, moved about with all the conscious dignity of long and faithful servitude, bearing round the circle such tea and coffee, in such china as was not often to be met with, on a noble silver salver, richly chased and emblazoned, like all the family plate, of which there was abundance in common use; and the smooth-headed, rosy-cheeked lad, who trode closely behind with his tray of cates, was remarked, by many a smiling observer, to copy, with very successful mimicry, his great-uncle's gravity of deportment—for the aged domestic and his youthful assistant stood in that near relation to each other.

No parade of further attendance was ever made on these company occasions. There was no conscription—no forced

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levy from the farm-yard and stable. The gardener and the cow-boy were not stuffed into spare liveries made to *fit* all sizes, and stuck up like scarecrows in the entrance-hall, or shoved into the drawing-room to poke forward refreshments with great red hands like lobsters' claws, and bony wrists protruding half a yard beyond the livery cuffs, to slide scalding coffee into ladies' laps, overset the candles, whisk their coat-flaps in the fire, and tread upon the tail of the old tortoise-shell; who, for her part, dear old Matty! occupied her wonted place on the hearth-rug in undisturbed serenity, evincing no emotion at the presence of company, or indeed any notice of the assembled guests, except by unbuttoning her eyes a very little wider, and purring a note or two louder, when either of them stooped down to court Mrs. Helen's favourite, by smoothing her velvet coat.

On one of those gala days, just before the arrival of the expected guests, I was the unlucky means of ruffling the composure of my dear old friend and protectress, more than I had ever seen it affected by any outward circumstance. I have hinted to you that my toilet duties and the concerns of my wardrobe were not always attended to with the scrupulous neatness I ought to have observed in those matters. I had been the companion and playmate of boys—of my brothers only—and the association had, naturally enough, moulded my tastes and habits more in conformity with theirs than was quite consonant with feminine propriety. Hence those uncouth pastimes to which I have confessed myself addicted; and the natural result of such exploits was the dilapidated state of a wardrobe from which it would have been difficult to select an upper garment in perfect preservation. And as the requisite repairs ostensibly devolved on me, and I abominated needlework, the general condition of the whole may be more easily conceived than described. On this especial evening I had been tenderly admonished to take timely care that my dress was *whole* and neat, not distinguished by appalling rents or disgraceful tuckings up; that it should be put on *properly*, that is, in good time, so as to be drawn equally over both shoulders, not dragged on in such hurry and bustle as to send me forth into the draw-

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ing-room all flushed and fluttered, and "frightened out of that fair propriety" which Mrs. Helen so justly deemed indispensable to the carriage of a gentle-woman. Mrs. Betty had, moreover, received private injunctions to superintend my toilet, and send me down "fit to be seen." But, alas! it so happened that about the time that respectable personage sought me, in pursuance of her lady's directions, I had rambled away into the adjoining hazel copse, and was too busily engaged in hooking down the bright brown clusters of ripe nuts, to remember Mrs. Helen's solemn injunctions; and when at last they started into my mind, and I scrambled and scampered back into the house, and up to my own chamber, Mrs. Betty's attention had been attracted to other weighty concerns, and I performed the ceremony of the toilet uncontrolled by her judicious censorship; and a pretty toilet I made of it!—a brief one, certainly—and I also reached the drawing-room in excellent good time, long before the arrival of company. Lucky was it that I did so—lucky for my own credit and the restoration of Mrs. Helen's elegant composure, which received an indescribable shock at my first awful appearance, still panting and breathless with my race home, and the bustle of changing my dress—arms, neck, and face crimsoned over, and shining to boot from the effects of a rough and hasty ablution in soap and water; which elegant cosmetic had by no means, however, contributed to efface or disguise sundry marks and scratches, (one happily conspicuous across the bridge of my nose,) inflicted by certain intercepting boughs and branches, with which I had too rashly encountered, in my reckless return through the hazel copse. Then the best frock was dragged on, to be sure—but not over both shoulders; and its clear texture too plainly revealed certain ghastly rents and fractures in the under garment, the tucks of which being all unripped on one side, lowered it to the very ground in careless festoons. I had considered the tedious operation of changing stockings quite a work of supererogation, and that I did very handsomely, in cramming my thick cotton ones, mud and all, into a pretty little pair of black satin

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slippers, the becomingness of which I was by no means insensible to.

Such was the apparition which presented itself to Mrs. Helen's delicate perceptions, as I entered her presence, dragging on, or rather pulling up, a pair of *once* white gloves, the size of jack-boots, through the thumbs and fingers of which, all gaping and curling back like the capsules of overblown flowers, my red thumbs and fingers protruded like ripe capsicums.

Mrs. Helen's first instinctive act was to pull the bell, as she had never pulled it but *once* before, when her own cap had taken fire. Now, as then, the whole household came running at the unaccustomed summons, but respectfully drew back, and made way for Mrs. Betty's approach, when once aware that their lady was neither on fire nor in a fit, and only unusually vehement in requiring the attendance of her faithful handmaiden.

"Oh! my good heavens, Betty!" ejaculated the dear old lady, in her imperfect English, (she was not a native of this island.) "Look at this child! look what she has done with herself—*Bon Dieu! quelle horreur!* But quick—quick—we must make something with her before the company come—*La pauvre enfant!*"

And they did try their best to make "something" of me. I was hurried into Mrs. Helen's dressingroom, and there she and the dismayed Betty set to work to rectify the incongruities of my dress at least. The scratched and scarlet face and neck were past mending for one while; and, truth to tell, only glowed and glistened the more fiercely for Mrs. Helen's tender application of rose-water and milk of roses. But the muslin frock was properly arranged over a whole under-garment. The muddy cotton stockings were exchanged for silk ones, an exchange which, once effected, I entirely approved of. A drawer of beautiful perfumed French gloves was pulled open, and a delicate pair, nicely fitted to my unworthy hands, the form and size of which, however, did not absolutely disgrace them; and as to the colour, that was of my own acquiring, and I was solemnly

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enjoined not to unglove it till it had subsided to a more lady-like complexion. The face and neck were not to be concealed or mended; and when we were once more in the drawing-room, my dear good cousin could not help reviewing me with looks in which a little vexation was still discernible, as she once or twice murmured to herself—"*La pauvre enfant!*"

Even that gentle ejaculation was thought too severe a rebuke by Mr. Seale, who comforted me under the infliction, and pledged himself to Mrs. Helen that I should be quite fit to be seen in ten minutes, and that I would never again transgress in like manner.

That night, while I was preparing for bed, thinking over my late inattention to Mrs. Helen's injunctions, and her indulgent gentleness, I could not help asking her ancient abigail, who was assisting me to undress, whether, in the whole course of her long service of five-and-forty years, she ever remembered to have seen her lady really out of temper? I could not ask if she had ever seen her in a passion. That was as much out of the scale of possibilities as it would have been for a lamb to roar like a lion, or a turtle-dove to exchange natures with a hawk. But Mrs. Betty quite astounded me with her prompt reply, "Oh, yes, miss! my mistress did *once* put herself into a fearful passion, at least my master said so, though for my part, I should never have found it out; and except *that once*, I never saw her so much vexed and disturbed as she was with you this evening; and you know, miss ——"

"Oh! Mrs. Betty, I know well enough how much I deserved a hearty scolding, and yet my dear cousin could not summon up so much as a frown to testify her displeasure. She in a passion! Dear Mrs. Betty, tell me all about it, I beseech you."

"Why, miss, you must know then, if there is one thing my mistress takes more pride in than another, it is that fine, old, rare china on the top of the commode in her dressing-room; but the finest piece of all is gone now—a large green jar that had belonged to her mother, and my mistress prized it dearly for that reason, and was so careful of it that she

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never suffered any one—not me even—to dust or touch it, or any thing else on that commode. Cicely is a good, steady, careful girl now, (you know Cicely, miss,) but she came to us a sad, giddy, careless, tearing young thing at first, about twenty years ago, and my mistress soon saw what a desperate hand she was at whisking and flicking about her duster; so she gave her double charges never so much as to go near any of the china, particularly that on the commode. Well, the careless wench must needs meddle with it, for all my mistress's warning; and one unlucky day, sure enough, down she whisked that beautiful green jar, and it was smashed all to pieces. My mistress heard the crash, and up stairs she was in a minute, and there stood Cicely, looking sheepish enough to be sure, and the jar all to particles at her feet. Well, miss, if you'll believe it, the tears came into my mistress's eyes, and, 'Oh!' says she, 'my dear mother's jar!' And then, to be sure, she did colour up over her very forehead, and spoke quicker than I have ever heard her before or since. 'Upon my word,' says she, 'this is too bad, after all my biddings. Go, go, you naughty, careless girl, and don't let me ——'

"She was going on, speaking very quick, but my master, who had followed her up into the room, came and took her hand, and motioning Cicely to go down stairs, (she did not wait for second orders, the careless hussy,) he led my dear mistress to the settee, and then, for all he kissed her kindly, and comforted her for the loss of their mother's favourite jar, he read her such a lecture about the sinfulness of giving way to such violent passions, as soon set her a-crying in good earnest, a dear, sweet soul! and me, too, to keep her company; though, for my life, I could not see any such great wickedness in the few words she had spoken, and that hussy's carelessness was enough to provoke a saint. But my dear mistress did not for a long time give over reproaching herself for having, as she said, given way to such unchristian violence of temper, and she went so far as to demean herself to that idle wench that had done all the mischief, and told her she was very sorry to have spoken so hastily, 'however blameable it was in you, Cicely,' says she, 'to

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disobey my orders; but I hope it will be a warning to you to be more careful in future, and above all, to avoid the fault of which I have been so unfortunate as to set you an example.' Lord bless her! we should all be angels upon earth if we could but follow the example she sets us; and I believe, o' my conscience, Cicely has been a steadier and a better girl from that very day, for she said, to be sure she minded my dear mistress's mild words more than a hundred scoldings."

I hardly knew whether to laugh or cry at Mrs. Betty's fragment of secret history; but I felt that every thing I heard about my dear excellent relations, increased my love and respect for them. Another little discovery, illustrative of Mrs. Helen's character, affected me far more seriously—almost painfully—soon after my arrival at the rectory. In the bedchamber assigned to me, which, as I told you, communicated with Mrs. Seale's dressing-room, besides the wardrobe and drawers allotted to my use, stood a second chest, containing, as Mrs. Betty notified to me, table and bed-linen, and sundry other things, which she would remove if I required additional room. I had much more than sufficient to contain all my possessions; but disorder requires perpetually expanding elbow-room, and it reigned paramount over my wardrobe, till at last all my own drawers being in a chaotic state of repletion, I resorted to those over which my right extended not, to lay by some article of dress on which I was disposed to bestow more than common care. I pulled open the first drawer of that same chest, then and there lay before me, not the smooth, flat-folded damask, or glossy bed-linen, on which I expected to have found room to deposit my own dress, but *one* long, white, glazy garment, all frilled and trimmed, and pinked, and scolloped about, in a strange uncouth fashion, such as I had never seen before; and yet in a moment—almost at the first glance—I had an instinctive shuddering consciousness of its destined appropriation; and I was standing motionless before the open drawer, gazing on its contents with eyes half-blinded by tears, but from which no tears fell, when Mrs. Betty entered the room, and startled me by her hasty exclamation—

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"Oh, miss! what are you looking at?" she cried. "I thought *that* drawer was locked. My mistress desired I would take particular care it was while you slept in the room; but I suppose I took out the key without turning it, and you see what *she* has made ready and laid there with her own dear hands."

I asked no question at that minute—indeed there was nothing to ask. That visible proof of solemn preparation was all-eloquent, and I continued gazing upon it with such heart-struck awe, as if the dear and venerable form it was one day to attire, had been already shrouded in its chilly folds. Language has no words to express that exquisitely painful sensation, that agony of intense feeling, which seems to contract and compress the heart, and arrest its pulsation, under the sudden operation of some distressful cause—and then the frightful violence of its restored action!—its seemingly audible throbs!—the abrupt sob that bursts forth, saving it as it were from breaking;—the hysterical choking!—the inarticulate attempt to speak!—I remember how I struggled with it all on that occasion, which was not (as some might hastily conceive) an inadequate cause for such painful excitement. It was the first time that Death had been brought home to me; that his insignia had appalled my sight; that his reality had impressed upon my heart its ever-afterwards indelible signet. And now the certainty of the inevitable doom burst on me, as if it were immediately to fall on those I loved so dearly—and I wondered at my past security, and thought with a cold shudder of the great ages of those beloved friends—of the advanced years of my own dear parents—and then I longed, with an agony of tender impatience, to draw them all close round me together; or rather, that I would encircle them all in one close embrace, never more to lose sight of them for one single minute, of those poor numbered few, yet remaining, of their stay upon earth.

The anticipation of my own equally irreversible doom had no share in that painful tumult of feeling. It is seldom, I believe, that the awful conviction of our own mortality impresses itself forcibly on the heart, while we are still buoyant

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with youth and health, and unbroken spirits, and unchastised expectations, and untarnished hopes. The paroxysms of youthful grief resemble the hail-storm, or the thunder-shower, which does not saturate the earth though it defaces its fair surface for a season, beating down the delicate flowers and the tender herbage. Deeper, far deeper, penetrates the small, continued rain—palsying, if ungenially cold, the very heart of vegetation; and so do the cares, and doubts, and disappointments, and troubles of advancing life, sink deep and deeper into the human heart, till its fine springs are broken, its beautiful illusions destroyed, its enthusiastic warmth extinguished; and then indeed comes the *sensible* conviction of our own mortality, and that we are hastening down a perceptibly rapid declivity, to "the house appointed for all living."

How wisely and mercifully is it ordained, that we should acquire thus gradually this solemn conviction! In early life, while all is well with us, we generally connect too inseparably the images of Death and the Grave; but as we approach nearer that final earthly home, a further prospect opens more distinctly on the Christian's eye; and though the destroying angel stands in the narrow passage, and we behold him even in all his revealed terrors, his dark pinions cannot intercept from our steady gaze that effulgence of glory which overpowers, with the brightness of its promise, our natural shrinking from the fearful things which intervene—from the array of Dissolution—the Shroud—the Coffin—and the Grave.

Besides, the weary traveller is content to lie down and be at rest. He whose journey is all before him, scarce heeding the sage warnings of experienced pilgrims, fancies that he at least shall be more fortunate—that he shall discover wells of water and pleasant places, which they missed in their way over the desert; or, rather, he fancies that "the land is a good land," that they have misnamed it a wilderness; and at all events, that there is much time before him, (though they call it brief,)—that the end is far distant—and he has not learnt to contemplate, much less to covet the repose of the grave. He believes in, but he does

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not *feel*, his *own* mortality—no, not even when that of his dearest friends is pressed home upon his heart, with that startling force and evidence of truth which so painfully affected me when I chanced on the discovery of Mrs. Helen's solemn preparations. I could not recover myself that whole day, nor look at my dear cousin without a strange, choking sensation, and my eyes filling with tears; and, at last, when the dear old lady noticed my unusual quietness, and questioned me, with kind anxiousness in her gentle voice, whether I was ailing or fatigued—the pent-up sorrow fairly got the better of me, and I clasped her round the neck, sobbing as if my heart would break, to my own unspeakable relief, and proportionate surprise and alarm on her part. But after much tender inquiry, and many soothing caresses, my hysterical affection, as Mrs. Helen termed it, was set down to the effects of over-fatigue, and exhausted spirits, and a restorative cordial was prescribed for me, (not the infallible plague-water,) and a comfortable posset was prepared for my supper, and I was dismissed early to bed, with many a tender kiss and affectionate injunction to sleep well, and not exhaust myself in future with over-activity and violent exercise.

On entering my chamber, I looked as fearfully askance towards the chest of drawers, as if I had expected that some ghastly phantom would occupy its place; and, before I began to undress, satisfied myself that Mrs. Betty had been true to her promise of locking fast that terrible repository, and taking away the key, as if, by so securing the object which had caused me such an unexpected shock, I could also exclude from my mind the images that shock had awakened. But the phantom was not laid so easily. That chest of drawers was to me like the mysterious box, immovably fixed in a corner of the merchant Abudah's chamber. I never looked towards it without something of distressful feeling; and I never became so familiarized with the idea of its contents, as to place on it, as I had been accustomed to do, my work-box, my flower-glass, or any other of my goods and chattels.

There was no assumption of singularity, or of superior

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strength of mind, in Mrs. Helen's funeral preparations. She would have concealed them, had it been possible, even from her faithful attendant; and when the latter tenderly remonstrated with her on the subject, she observed with a cheerful and cheering smile, "It will not kill me one minute the sooner, my good Betty; and, when the time comes, all will be ready, without much trouble for any body."

Besides, the custom of providing burial-clothes was still very prevalent in Mrs. Seale's time, among the many primitive customs of her native land. Of these, all that would bear transplanting, she had imported to Broad Summerford some fifty years before, when she had accompanied her brother thither, on his taking possession of the rectory.—Yes, for full fifty years that brother and sister had "dwelt together in unity," in that same quiet mansion;—"lovely and inseparable in their lives," indeed, but in their deaths not to be united. Not in the grave, at least. Who can doubt that they are so, and for eternity, in their Father's kingdom?

But this has been a long gossip; and I reserve for another day my remaining store of reminiscences from this fragment of the family chronicle.

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CHAPTER XII.

BROAD SUMMERFORD.

I DO believe, continued the faithful historian, that in the whole course of her life, Mrs. Helen Seale had never conceived (much less indulged) but one *purely* selfish wish. That *one*, however, was so earnest, that, inasmuch as was consistent with the most unreserved submission to the will of Providence, she made it her humble and frequent prayer, that it might please God to take her to himself, before her beloved brother was called to rest from his labours. It was a natural—*almost* a blameless wish. The shrinking of a tender and timid spirit, from the prospect of being left to solitary decay under the burden of accumulating infirmities, and the fond, though perhaps *irrational* desire, that the earthly remains of her beloved companion and her own might mingle together in the same grave.

She was well aware, that if Mr. Seale departed first, the poor remnant of her days must find an asylum far from Summerford; and it was her maxim (adapted to the subject of interment) that "where the tree falls, there it *should* lie." So she earnestly prayed to God to take *her* first, if it was his good pleasure to do so.

And Mr. Seale, with like perfect submission to the Divine will, whatever its decree, made it his prayer also, that his beloved companion might be taken first. Oh! how affecting was that wish—how beautifully disinterested! But he reflected truly, that it mattered little how dark—how cheerless—how companionless (humanly speaking) might be the last mile of a long journey, provided the lights of Home are fixedly in view, and the traveller confidently expects to find there, already safe in harbour, the beloved ones who have outstripped him on the way.

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But to leave *one* behind—one dear desolate being, infirm and helpless, to tread alone that last dreary portion of life's pilgrimage! It was a momentary pang, repressed as soon as felt; but *that* thought entered like iron into the brother's soul, as sometimes, while apparently absorbed in his book, he gazed with moistened eyes, from under his overshadowing hand, on the gentle, fragile creature whom he had cherished and protected for so many years, with a love "passing the love of woman." At such moments, *his* mental ejaculation was—"Take *her* first, oh God! if it seem good unto thee." The brother and sister were not ignorant of their mutual wish. They had no secrets for each other—no reservation of false tenderness—no mistaken averseness to talk together freely and frequently of their approaching earthly separation. But that was only spoken of with serious brevity, with interchanged looks, and clasping hands, expressive of mutual encouragement; and then they discoursed, long—fully—fondly—almost rapturously, of their sure and certain reunion in that Good Land, where there shall be no more tears—no more parting—no more sin—no more sorrow.

But though the prayer of the righteous doth most assuredly ascend up into Heaven, and find favour with his Maker, it followeth not, therefore, that the All-Wise, who judgeth not as man judgeth, may see fit to *grant* the petition. He often grants in wrath, and denies in mercy—contents the unreasonable, or perverse, or impious wish, and disappoints the blameless and humble desire of the pure and pious heart. To the eye of faith His ways are sufficiently justified, even in *this* world; and at the consummation of all things, we shall understand, as well as acknowledge, their infinite perfection.

It was *not* the good pleasure of their heavenly Father, that the aged pair at Summerford rectory should depart thence to their better habitation, in the order that might have seemed happiest for them, to human judgment. The gentlest, the weakest, the most infirm, the most helpless, was left behind, to superficial observation, alone and desolate. The beloved brother, the tender companion, the faith-

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ful comforter, the life-long friend, was called first to his reward; and when the hour of parting *actually* arrived, both felt—the departing Christian and she who had so little while to tarry after him—that a strong arm was around them in their trial, and that it was indeed a matter of small moment, which first overstepped the threshold of eternity. There were after-moments in store for the bereaved survivor (and she knew it well) of natural weakness—of inexpressible anguish—of conscious desolation; but the anticipation of those troubled not the almost divine composure which irradiated her meek countenance, as she partook with her expiring brother of those consecrated elements, which she had so often received from his own hands, at the altar of that church wherein he had ministered so long, and so faithfully.

There was not a dry eye among the many hundred persons assembled in and about the churchyard of Broad Summerford, on the day of Mr. Seale's funeral—not a dry eye throughout the whole assemblage, except those of the venerable greyhaired man immediately following the two gentlemen who attended as chief mourners. He walked quite alone—bowed down with the burden of threescore years and ten, and of a sorrow which sought no vent in outward demonstration. His hand had helped to arrange the pall over the coffin of his dead master. His arm (as the corpse was carried through the door-way) had been stretched forward with cautionary gesture—for word he spake not—as if to guard the insensible burden from rude or sudden contact; and his dim eyes were never for a moment diverted from that last object of his earthly care, till it was laid in its appointed house, and the cords were withdrawn from beneath the coffin, and the earth rattled on its lid, and had covered up for ever from mortal sight, all of the departed saint over which the grave was permitted to assert its victory. Then, as having fulfilled his office even unto the end, John Somers raised his eyes from earth to heaven, his lips quivering with a few words of inward ejaculation, and turning slowly from the brink of the grave—and yet pausing to look back on it, with an expression that seemed to

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say, "Why may I not *now* lie down beside my master?"—he shook his head as it declined upon his breast; and so, silently acknowledging the kind but unavailing sympathy of the many who would have pressed about him with well-meant officiousness, he passed on quietly through the hushed assemblage, and laying his hand on the ready shoulder of his young grand-nephew, slowly and feebly retraced his steps towards the rectory, and up to his own chamber, and taking his bed almost immediately, he arose thence no more—till, at the end of a few weeks—having received the grateful farewell of his aged mistress—for whose service, had it been permitted, he would still have consented to live a little longer—he also was borne along the churchyard path, and interred in the same grave with his revered master.

Such had been Mr. Seale's testamentary request, in case his old servant (who had been long declining) should end his days at Summerford. He also gave directions respecting the memorial stone, which should mark out the place of their joint sepulchre; and it may be seen to this day under the shade of a broad maple, which stands in the east corner of Summerford churchyard—a plain thick slab of grey marble—on which it is simply recorded, that

UNDERNEATH
LIETH THE BODY
OF
THE REV. JOHN SEALE,
AGED 83 YEARS,
(52 OF WHICH HE HAD BEEN MINISTER TO THAT PARISH;)
AND OF HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT,
JOHN SOMERS,
AGED 81 YEARS.

Amidst the incessant fluctuation of human affairs, of those especially characterizing the state of society in our own country, there are few circumstances more generally affecting than the departure of a widow from her husband's house. Even under the most favourable aspect—when she departs in ease and affluence—voluntarily departs—voluntarily, at

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the suggestion of her own judgment, resigns the home of which she has been so long sole mistress, into the rule of a tender son, and of a daughter-in-law scarcely less dutiful than Ruth—both of whom would fain detain her, to be, with her wisdom and her grey hairs, the crown and glory of their household—even under circumstances so favoured, it cannot be but that the woman most firm of purpose, *must* feel (if she have common sensibility) some natural yearning, some momentary pang, when she looks back on that abode, to which, in the prime of her youth and beauty, she was led a young and happy bride—where her children first saw the light, and grew up like olive branches about their parent's table—and going forth into the world, returned and returned again to the blessed re-union of the domestic circle—where she bore mild rule over her household, setting it the pattern of her own pure and virtuous life—where no poor man ever turned unrelieved from her gate, and no neighbour unwelcomed from her hospitable door—and where, above all, she has shared with the partner of her life their common cup of hopes and fears, of joy and sorrow, of fruition and disappointment—where they had grown grey together, encouraging one another in the down-hill way, till at last the fiat of separation came, and, with a woman's devotedness, she had received the departing breath, and closed the expiring eye.——All these, and innumerable other affecting recollections, must crowd together into the widow's heart, when she looks back upon that home which she shall no more re-enter but as a temporary guest. But when her departure is *not* voluntary—when her dwelling devolves to strangers, or to distant kindred, and therefore she must leave it—or to a heartless son, who, to the prayer of "the asking eye," answereth not "abide with us, my mother," and therefore she must leave it—or when (being attached to church preferment) it passeth into the hands of a new incumbent, and therefore she must leave it—(ah! how often under circumstances of accumulated distress!) *then*, indeed, it is painful to think of the departure of a widow from her husband's house.

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Never widow sustained a heavier loss by the best husband's death, than did Mrs. Helen Seale by that of the best of brothers. And by his decease the living of Broad Summerford falling to a new rector, she had of course to provide another home for the short residue of her earthly sojourn. The choice of that asylum was hardly left to her own free-will, so pressing were the entreaties of her numerous kindred that she would take up her abode among them in her native island. I fear, indeed, that she was sorely beset on the occasion, and that, when finally prevailed on to fix her residence beneath the roof of two female cousins, she rather yielded to importunity, and to what she considered a grateful sense of their desire to accommodate her, than to the secret inclinations of her own meek and affectionate heart, whose dictates, had she attended to them only, would probably have induced her to re-establish herself in England, in the vicinity of my parents, her most beloved, and, I may say, most disinterestedly attached relations. But matters were ordered otherwise. The maiden sisters obtained Mrs. Helen's promise to establish herself with them; and it was furthermore decreed, that a male relation of both parties, one of Mr. Seale's executors, should escort her to her new place of abode, when the affairs which were likely to detain her in England were finally arranged. In truth, the necessary delay was to her a respite; for grievous as was the void in all her home enjoyments, irreparable as was the change at the rectory, it was still full of associations and recollections more precious to her than any social comforts the world had now to offer.

It was soon known at Summerford, that the living was already bestowed, by its young titled patron, on a college friend of his own standing, just qualified to hold it; and rumor prepared the parishioners to expect in him a pastoral guide of very different character from that of their late venerable minister. Mr. Seale's curate was, however, continued in his functions *pro tempore*, and for a few weeks nothing decisive was known of the new rector.

In as far as was compatible with the great change which had taken place in her earthly circumstances—and in spite

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of her approaching removal—so omnipotent is habit, that Mrs. Helen had again fallen quietly into the routine of her accustomed occupations and household cares; and a superficial observer would have perceived little alteration in her deportment and person, except that the former was somewhat more subdued and serious—that her quiet movements were more slow and feeble—and that she looked more aged, partly from an increased stoop in her gait, and from the exchange of her usual attire for a still closer garb of the deepest mourning. Her soft fair hair, scarcely silvered till her brother's death, but now completely blanched, was no longer smoothed up over the roll beneath her clear lawn cap, but parted and combed straight on either side, under the broad mourning hems of a close mob; and a large black silk handkerchief, crossed over her bosom, almost concealed the under one of thick white muslin. Thus habited, Mrs. Helen was one evening engaged in her store-room, superintending and assisting in the homely office, of which I have before made mention—that of sugar-nipping. One of Mrs. Betty's aprons was pinned before her own, but Mrs. Betty herself had been despatched on some errand to a distant part of the house; and the former comely *embonpoint* of that faithful handmaid having amplified to a vast weight of portliness, she moved with corresponding majesty of gait, and was long absent on her five minutes' mission. It was near midsummer—not a leaf stirred in the glow of a cloudless sunset—not a domestic creature, fowl, beast, or biped, was visible about the rectory, every door and window of which were flung wide open, so that a stranger might have entered unnoticed, and found his way unimpeded into every chamber of the mansion. Suddenly wheels were heard rapidly approaching the entrance gate. Then the short pull up and knowing check of some dashing Jehu, as he flung the reins with various charges to an attendant groom—then the clinking of spurs and the creaking of boots across the court—in the entrance-hall, (for no regular summons was sounded, and no servant appeared to question the intruder)—in the parlour—along the vestibule—and at last in the very passage conducting to Mrs. Helen's sacred apartment—the whole

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progress being accompanied by certain musical variations between a song and a whistle, and the pattering of four-footed creatures, and the admonitions of—"Down, Ponto; down, sir!" "Back, Di; back, you toad!"—apparently unheeded by the canine offenders, for in they rushed, a brace of noble pointers, into the very presence of Mrs. Helen, and immediately their noisy owner stood *in propria persona*, on the very threshold of her sanctuary. There stood the dear old lady, not exactly

> "With locks flung back, and lips apart,
> Fit monument of Grecian art;"

but certainly with "lips apart," and slightly quivering with surprise and trepidation—her mild blue eyes, expressive of strange perplexity, the nippers in one hand and a lump of sugar in the other; and, as I told you, Mrs. Betty's apron (a checked one as it happened) pinned over her own of snowy muslin. And there stood the intruder, a handsome, good-humoured-looking coxcomb, six feet high, in a pepper-and-salt frock, tight buckskins, and yellow-topped boots; a most unclerical beaver rakishly set on one side—a silver whistle dangling from his button-hole, and an eyeglass round his neck, through which he took deliberate cognizance of the apartment and its venerable occupant. The latter soon became aware, that, in the phenomenon before her, she beheld the successor of her late revered brother; and before the shock and amazement incident on that discovery had any way subsided, the young parson, evidently mistaking her for a housekeeper, or upper servant, proceeded to make very unceromonious observations and enquiries; almost immediately, however, cutting short the string of his own queries, by the still more cavalier address of—"But that will do by-and-by—time enough to ransack the old kennel—and now I'm starving—so despatch, old girl! D'ye hear? and get me something to eat, if you've any prog in the house."

Mrs. Helen was aware of his mistake, and neither mortified nor indignant at the unaccustomed salutation; on the

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contrary, when she heard this pressing appeal to her hospitality, the natural disgust excited by his unclerical appearance, gave place to her innate kindliness; and anxious to supply his wants—and, if possible, with the particular sort of viand which she imagined him to have specified, she looked up in his face with grave simplicity, and very seriously inquired—"Pray, sir, what is prog?"

The question set him off in a roar of laughter, and, before the fit had half subsided, Mrs. Betty's entrance undeceived him as to the rank of the person he had been so jocularly addressing; and then the young man, who, though very unclerically disposed, was neither unfeeling nor ill-bred, became really confused and distressed at the recollection of his absurd behaviour, and endeavoured to atone for it by the most respectful apologies. They were very placably accepted; and a servant having been summoned to show the new rector to a sitting-room, or to his chamber—or, if it suited his convenience, to take a brief survey of the mansion to which he came with a master's right, Mrs. Helen gave directions for the preparation of such refreshments as could be served up with the least delay; and her famished guest found them so excellent in their way, that his respect for the hospitable entertainer increased with every mouthful; and it was magnified to absolute veneration by the time his repast was concluded.

A breakfast table, supplied with the finest Mocha coffee, the most perfect "green imperial," the most savoury potted meats, the richest orange marmalade, and the thickest cream he had ever regaled on, put the climax to his ecstatic admiration of the venerable hostess; and if at that moment he did not actually conceive the idea of addressing her with matrimonial proposals—the possibility of detaining her as superintendent of his future establishment, did certainly suggest itself—"For, what could I do better?" he very rationally soliloquized—"a nice, kind, motherly old lady!—gives capital feeds!—never tasted such potted shrimps!—makes tea like an angel!—won't be much in the way—(not half so bad as a wife)—and I must have somebody."

Very rational cogitations!—But the young rector was too

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politic and well-bred to broach the subject abruptly to his ladylike hostess; and having informed himself of all particulars respecting her—of her high respectability and perfect independence—that knowledge, though it confirmed his desire to detain her at the rectory, made him aware that his only chance of success would be to ingratiate himself by respectful attention, and, if possible, to interest her kind feelings in his behalf, before he ventured on the grand proposal. It was by no means difficult to effect the latter object. Mrs. Helen's benevolence extended itself over every thing that lived and breathed; and her new inmate, besides that he sedulously cultivated her good opinion, really possessed many amiable, and some sterling qualities.

Left, in his earliest infancy, to the sole care of a doting widowed mother, he had been a most affectionate and dutiful son; and tender recollections of his lost parent (whose death was yet recent) made him more feelingly alive to the maternal kindness of his new acquaintance. He was by no means viciously disposed, though the world and the world's ways had too much influence over a heart of which the clerical profession was not the free disinterested choice; and though it was too probable that in many and material points he would fall far short of the late rector's amiable example, he showed an early and sincere intention to emulate it in beneficence at least, and only required to be directed in the distribution of his bounty by Mrs. Helen's judgment and experience.

He could scarcely have urged a more efficient plea for the venerable lady's continuance at Broad Summerford; and, moreover, he succeeded in exciting her compassion for his utter inexperience in housekeeping and the management of a family, and for the loneliess to which he should be condemned if she persevered in her intention of departure; and, by a master-stroke of policy, he so craftily insinuated himself into Mrs. Betty's good graces, as to enlist all her influence in his favour, so that the ancient handmaiden lost no opportunity of observing to her lady, that it would be almost a sin to leave such an innocent open-hearted young gentleman, no more fit to keep house than the babe unborn, to be

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preyed upon and devoured like a lamb among a flock of wolves, by a pack of idle rogues and hussies. "And then," said she, "though to be sure he falls far short of what *has been* at the rectory, and can *never come up to that*, yet who knows ma'am, what *we* might make of him in the end: and, at any rate, you would not think of leaving him, just as the pickling and preserving time is coming on, and there is not so much as a pot of black currant jelly left, (and he told me he was subject to bad sore throats,) and all the tincture of rhubarb and the senna walnuts are out, and Betty Hinks had the last of the palsy-water yesterday; and I am sure you would not choose to leave him only the bare shelves, poor young gentleman, or without a handsome stock of every thing good and comfortable. Besides, I've just set Cicely about a set of new shirts for him—(I got the cambric a bargain;) and then there's all his household linen to be provided, though, to be sure, if *we* were to stay——"

If Mrs. Betty had studied the art of oratory, she could not more happily have timed the *pause politic*. Her incomplete sentence—"*If we* were to stay——" left Mrs. Helen to ponder over all the real good she might do, if she *did* stay—and *her secret* enumeration went further, perhaps, and extended to nobler views, than were particularized in Mrs. Betty's catalogue. "To do good," was the most influential of all motives with one of Mrs. Helen's truly Christian character—and to bless had been the business of her life. Now, though bereaved of him in whose life hers had been bound up, those affections which had centred in him did not all shrink inward, absorbed in selfish sorrow; and they had been greatly won upon by the respectful and almost filial attention of her young acquaintance. There was no congeniality of disposition between herself and the persons who had importuned her to dwell among them, neither had they any near or dear claims upon her; and then, though she had never uttered one idle regret, never indulged one thought that savoured of repining, her heart clung to the earth—the very earth of Broad Summerford—above all, to that narrow portion of it hallowed by the grave of her beloved companion. All these considerations, and possibly

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something of the natural effect of age on a singularly gentle character, the force of habit, the dread of change, the formidable prospect of a journey and a voyage of isolation among strangers—all these considerations and circumstances co-operated so well with the young rector's persuasive eloquence, that Mrs. Helen would probably have ended her days at Broad Summerford, had she been left to her own uncontrolled decision.

But she had some thousands at her sole disposal, and the tender solicitude with which her distant kindred had pressed her to reside among them, was so far from suffering any abatement by "hope deferred," that it kindled into a glow of inexpressible impatience for her removal from Broad Summerford, when they became aware that the unexpected conduct of the new rector had more than half-reconciled her to continue there; so they zealously bestirred themselves in assisting her to arrange the affairs which still required her presence in England. Business that (as they had lately averred) would require months to settle, was now disposed of in as many days. Difficulties were smoothed, objections levelled, obstacles removed, (no such pioneer as interested zeal,) promises insisted on, claims of blood, of affection, of propriety, urged imperatively, almost reproachfully, till the object was effected; and the good old lady, with her ancient abigail, the staid Cicely, and John Somers's grand-nephew, (now advanced to his uncle's office,) were uprooted from their peaceful home, and transported the weary way by sea and land, to that which had been provided for them under the roof of the maiden sisters, whose capacious and commodious dwelling had obtained for them the warmly-contested privilege of receiving, or rather making prize of their "dear cousin."

I wish I could tell you—I wish I could persuade myself, that the remaining years of my dear old friend found a happy and serene asylum in that which she was rather compelled than persuaded to accept. At best, the contrast between that latter home, and the one she had so long inhabited, must have been felt painfully. But I fear, I fear, all was not done that might have been done, to render

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the change less striking—that when the removal was finally effected—and the "dear cousin" safely deposited within a ring-fence of kindred surveillance, that love grew cold, and zeal relaxed, and respect abated of its observances; and as the meek spirit bowed down with the declining frame, advantage was taken of those affecting circumstances; and she who, under the fostering care of watchful affection, or even in the quiet independence of her own free home, might still have supported her honoured part in society, and tasted the sweets of social intercourse, sunk into a very cipher, obviously treated as such, in an establishment, of which, though spoken of as a household partnership, she bore the entire charges. And when, about two years after the removal from Summerford, it pleased God (by a sudden stroke) to deprive her of her faithful friend and servant, whose indignant spirit and honest zeal had in some measure stemmed the tide of encroachments on the independence of her more gentle and passive mistress—when it pleased God to take away from her this faithful creature, under various frivolous pretences, it was soon afterwards contrived to remove from about her the two other attached servants who had followed her fortunes from Summerford.

> "What need of two?" they said, "what need of one?
> To follow in a house, where twice so many
> Have a command to tend you?
> * * * * * *
> "I pr'ythee, lady! being weak, *seem* so.
> All's not offence that indiscretion finds,
> And dotage terms so."

But the mild nature so heartlessly aggrieved took no offence—complained of no injuries—resisted no indignities. Unhappily, perhaps, she was too silent, too passive; for a word of appeal from herself would have brought friends, and firm ones, to her rescue. But she was timid by nature, and her mental energies gave way at the first shock of unkindness. Her life was protracted to an unusual extent; but for many years before her death, repeated, though silent pa-

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ralytic seizures had partially deprived her of the use of speech. *Partially* only; for though unable to express her wants and wishes in explicit language, or to utter a sentence in common conversation, she could recite the Psalms—the whole book of Psalms—with unfailing accuracy and unfaltering articulation; and those sacred songs became *her language*, adapted and applied to all such subjects as she was inclined to notice, with an aptness and promptitude which bespoke an inspired, rather than a disordered intellect; and hers was not disordered. The fearful spirit sank under oppression and neglect; but the believing soul took refuge with its God—communed continually with him in the sublimest of all strains; and it is not presumptuous to believe, that when the faltering tongue breathed out that pathetic appeal—"Leave me not in the time of mine old age, neither forsake me when my strength faileth me"—it is not too much to believe that an answer was immediately vouchsafed, and that the inward ears were blessed with the sound of that gracious assurance—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." To the last (for such sublime colloquy) her utterance and her intellect failed not. From the period that those divine songs had become her sole language, she had continually recited them in the accents of her mother-tongue, and one who stood beside her death-bed told me, that the moment before her departure, she slowly and audibly articulated—

"Mon ame, retourne, en ton répos, car l'Eternal t'a fait du bien. Je marcherai en la présence de l'Eternal, dans la terre des vivans——"

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE HAUNTED CHURCHYARD.

A FRIEND of mine, with whom I lately compared churchyard "*experiences*," gave me a little narrative of one which had recently fallen to his share, during an angling excursion in one of our northern counties. It will be best and easiest to let the narrator speak in his person; so, without further preamble, "I tell the tale as it was told to me."

Arriving about dark one evening at a large village, where I proposed taking up my quarters for the night, I observed a general stir and agitation, as if a beehive were pouring forth its swarming colonists; and as I proceeded down the long straggling street, towards the sign of the "Jolly Miller," the whole population of the place seemed streaming in the opposite direction of the churchyard, which I had passed at the entrance of the village. Men, women, and children were hurrying along, with an appearance of eager trepidation; and there was a general hum of voices, though every one seemed to speak below his natural key, except a few blustering youngsters, who were whetting their own courage, by boasting of it with valiant oaths and asseverations, and ridiculing the cowardice of the women and children. The latter were running along close by their mothers, holding fast by their gowns or aprons, and every minute pressing nearer, and looking up in their faces, with eyes of fearful inquiry. As the different groups scudded swiftly by me, I caught here and there a few disjointed words about "a ghost," and "the churchyard," and "all in white," and "old Andrew," and "ten foot high," and "very awful!" Half-tempted was I to turn with the stream, and wind up my day's sport with a *ghost hunt;* but the sign of the Jolly Miller waving before me, and the

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brown loaf, and foaming can, so naturally depicted thereon, were irresistible attractions to a poor piscator, who had fasted since early morning from all but the delights of angling; and who, as day declined, had followed the windings of the stream for many a weary mile, to seek rest and refreshment at the village hostelrie. It was well for me that I arrived not in equestrian equipage; for neither landlord, hostler, nor male biped of any denomination was visible about the large old house and its adjacent stable-yard. But I needed no attendance; so stooping with my shoulder-load of rod, basket, and landing-net, as I stepped down one step into the low, heavy, old porch, I passed straight on into the kitchen, where a blazing fire in the huge gaping chimney gave me a cheerful welcome, though neither there, nor in the adjoining tap-room, could I espy signs or tokens of any living creature.

I could have been well contented to take silent possession of one of the high-backed settles within the inglenook, had there been wherewithal within reach to appease "the rage of hunger," whose importunate calls were rather incited than suppressed by the feeling of warmth and comfort which circulated through my whole frame, as I stood beside the companionable hearth. So I called lustily, and thumped the end of my fishing-rod against the heavy oak table and dark wooden partition, till at last came hurrying forth from an inner chamber, a little old woman, whose sharp shrivelled face betokened no mood of sweet complacency. But a few words, intimating my intentions of sojourning in her house that night, and my voracious designs upon her larder and ale-butt, smoothed, as if by magic, half the wrinkles in her face, and put her in such good-humour, with *me* at least, that she would fain have installed me into the chilling magnificence of the parlour, whose sanded and boarded floor, and dismal fireless grate, nodding with plumes of fennel, like the Enchanted Helmet in the Castle of Otranto, I was obliged to glance at, though the first glimpse sent me back with shivering eagerness to the comforts of the kitchen-hearth, where at last I was permitted to settle myself, while mine hostess spread for me a little claw-table, with a snow-

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white cloth, and set about preparing my savoury supper of fried eggs and rashers.

It was not till I had despatched two courses of those, with a proportionate quantum of "jolly good ale and old," that I found leisure, while attacking the picturesque ruins of a fine old Cheshire cheese, to question mine ancient hostess respecting those signs of popular agitation which had excited my curiosity as I came through the village. My enquiry set wide open the floodgates of her eloquence and indignation. "Well I might ask," she said, "but, for her part, she was almost ashamed to tell me what fools the folks made of themselves,—her master among 'em,—who was old enough to know better, Lord help him! than to set off, night after night, galloping after a ghost,—with Bob Ostler at his heels, and that idle hussy Beckey,—leaving her to mind the house, and look to every thing, and be robbed and murdered for what they knew,—and all for what quotha? She wished, when *their* time came, they might lie half as quiet in their graves as old Andrew did in his, for all their nonsensical crazy talk about his walking o' nights." I waited patiently till the 'larum had unwound itself, then taking up that part of the desultory invective which more immediately related to the haunted churchyard, and its unquiet tenant, I got the old lady fairly into the mood of story-telling; and from what she then related to me, and from after gleanings among other inhabitants of the village, succeeded in stringing together a tolerably connected narrative.

Andrew Cleaves, whose remains had been interred the preceding week in Redburn Churchyard, was the oldest man in its large and populous parish, and had been one of the most prosperous among its numerous class of thriving and industrious husbandmen.

His little property, which had descended from father to son for many generations, consisted of a large and comfortable cottage, situated on the remote verge of the village common, a productive garden, and a few fields, which he cultivated so successfully, rising up early, and late taking rest, that by the time he had attained the middle period of

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life, he was enabled to rent a score more acres—had got together a pretty stock of cattle, had built a barn, and enclosed a rick-yard, and drove as fine a team as any in the parish—was altogether accounted a man "well to do in the world," and was generally addressed by the style and title of "Farmer Cleaves." Then, and not till then, and still with most phlegmatic deliberation, he began to look about him for a partner: a *help meet*, in the true homely sense of the word, was the wife he desired to take unto himself; and it was all in vain—"Love's Labour Lost"—that many a wealthy farmer's flaunting daughter, and many a gay damsel of the second table, from my lord's and the squire's, and divers other fair ones, set their caps at wary Andrew, and spake sweet words to him when *chance* threw them in his path, and looked sweet looks at him when he sat within eye-shot at church, in his own old oaken pew, hard by the clerk's desk, with his tall, bony, athletic person erect as a poker, and his coal-black hair (glossy as the raven's wing) combed smooth down over his forehead, till it touched the parallel line of two straight jetty eyebrows, almost meeting over the high curved nose, and overhanging a pair of eyes, dark, keen, and lustrous, but, withal, of a severe and saturnine expression, well in keeping with that of the closely compressed lips and angular jaw. Those lips were not made to utter tender nonsense, nor those eyes for ogling, verily; but the latter were sharp and discerning enough to find out such qualifications as he had laid down to himself, as indispensable in his destined spouse, among which (though Andrew Cleaves was justly accounted a close, penurious man) money was *not* a paramount consideration, as he wisely argued within himself, a prudent wife might save him a *fortune* though she did not bring one. A small matter by way of portion could not come amiss, however; and Andrew naturally weighed in with her other perfections the twenty years' savings of the vicar's housekeeper, whose age did not greatly exceed his own, who was acknowledged to be the best housewife in the parish, and the most skilful dairy-woman, having come from a famous cheese country, whose fashions she had successfully introduced at Redburn Vicarage. Beside which,

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Mrs. Dinah was a staid, quiet person—not given to gadding, and gossiping, and idle conversation; and, "moreover," quoth Andrew, "I have a respect unto the damsel, and, verily, I might go farther and fare worse."

"Marry in haste and repent at leisure," was, however, another of Andrew's favourite sayings, so he took another year or two to consider the matter in all its bearings; but as all things earthly come to an end, so at last did Andrew Cleaves's ponderings; and as his actual wooing was by no means so tedious an affair, and as the discreet Dinah had had ample time for deliberation while the important question was pending, the favoured suitor was not kept long on the rack of uncertainty, and the third Sunday, which completed the bans, saw Mrs. Dinah "endowed," by Andrew Cleaves, with "all his worldly goods," and installed Lady and Mistress of his hitherto lonely dwelling.

He had no reason to repent his choice. For once Dame Fortune (so often reviled for her strange blunders in match-making—so often accused of "joining the gentle with the rude,") had hooked together two kindred souls; and it seemed, indeed, as if Andrew had only reunited to himself a sometime divided portion of his own nature, so marvellously did he and his prudent Dinah sympathize in their views, habits, and principles. Thrift—thrift—thrift—and the accumulation of worldly substance, was the end and aim of all their thoughts, dreams, and undertakings; yet were they rigidly just and honest in all their dealings, even *beyond* the strict letter of the law, of which they scorned to take advantage in a doubtful matter; and Andrew Cleaves had been known more than once to come forward to the assistance of distressed neighbours, (on *good security* indeed,) but on more liberal terms than could have been expected from one of his parsimonious habits, or than were offered by persons of more reputed generosity.

Moreover, he was accounted—and he surely accounted himself—a very religious man, and a very pious Christian—"a serious Christian" he denominated himself; and such a one he was in good truth, if a sad and grave aspect—solemn speech, much abounding in scriptural phrases—slow de-

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livery—erect deportment, and unsocial reserve, constitute fair claims to this distinction. Moreover, he was a regular church-goer—an indefatigable reader of his Bible, (of the Old Testament, and the Epistles in particular,)—fasted rigidly on all days appointed by the church—broke the heads of all the little boys who whistled, within his hearing, on Sabbaths and Saints' days—said immoderate long graces before and after meals, and sang hymns by the hour, though he had no more voice than a cracked pitcher, and not ear enough to distinguish between the tunes of the 100th Psalm and "Molly put the kettle on."

Besides all this, he had been a dutiful, if not an affectionate son—was a good, if not a tender husband—a neighbour of whose integrity no one doubted—a most respectable parishioner; and yet, with all this, Andrew Cleaves's was not *vital religion*, for it partook not of that blessed spirit of love, meekness, and charity, which vaunteth not itself—is not puffed up—thinketh no evil of its neighbour—neither maketh broad its phylacteries, nor prayeth in the corners of market-places, to be seen of men. He was neither extortionate nor a drunkard. He gave tithes of all that he possessed. He *did not* give *half* his goods to feed the poor, but, nevertheless, contrived to make out such a catalogue of claims on the peculiar favour of Heaven, as very comfortably satisfied his own conscience, and left him quite at leisure to "despise others."

It had been the misfortune of Andrew Cleaves, to have imbibed from his parents those narrow views of Christianity; and their early death had left him an unsociable being, unloving, unloved, and unconnected, till he changed his single for a married state.

> "Habits are stubborn things;
> And by the time a man is turn'd of forty,
> His ruling passions grow so haughty,
> There is no clipping of his wings."

Now Andrew was full forty-three when he entered the pale of matrimony, and the staid Dinah, three good years his

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senior, had no wish to clip them, being, as we have demonstrated, his very counterpart, his "mutual heart" in all essential points; so, without a spark of what silly swains and simple maidens call love, and some wedded folks, "tender friendship," our serious couple jogged on together in a perfect matrimonial railroad of monotonous conformity; and Andrew Cleaves might have gone down to his grave unconscious that hearts were made for any other purpose than to circulate the blood, if the birth of a son, in the second year of his union, had not opened up in his bosom such a fountain of love and tenderness, as gushed out, like water from the flinty rock, and became thenceforth the master passion, the humanizing feeling of his stern and powerful character. The mother's fondness—and she was a fond mother—was nothing, compared with that with which the father doted on his babe; and he would rock its cradle, or hush it in his arms, or sing to it by the hour, though the lullaby seldom varied from the 100th Psalm, and, as he danced it to the same exhilarating tune, it was a wonder that the little Josiah clapped his hands and crowed with antic mirth, instead of comporting himself with the solemnity of a parish clerk in swaddling clothes.

It was strange and pleasant to observe, how the new and holy feeling of parental love penetrated, like a fertilizing dew, the hitherto hard, insensible nature of Andrew Cleaves; how it extended its sweet influence beyond the exciting object (the infant darling) to his fellow creatures in general, disposing his heart to kindliness and pity, and almost to sociability. In the latter virtue, he made so great progress as to invite a few neighbours to the christening feast, charging his dame to treat them handsomely to the best of every thing; and he himself, for the first time in his life "on hospitable thoughts intent," pressed and smiled, and played the courteous host to a miracle.

And sometimes, on his way home of an evening, he would stop and exchange a few words with an acquaintance at his cottage door, attracted by the sight of some chubby boy, with whose stout limbs and infant vigour he would compare, in his mind's eye, the healthful beauty of his own

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urchin. But great indeed was the amazement of Dame Cleaves, when Andrew, who had always "set his face like a flint" against the whole tribe of idle mendicants, making it a rule not only to chase them from his own door, but to consign them, if possible, to the wholesome coercion of the parish stocks, actually went the length of bestowing a comfortable meal, a night's shelter in an outhouse, and a bed of clean straw, on a soldier's widow, who was travelling, with her babe in her arms, towards the far distant home of its dead father.

Dame Cleaves stared in strange perplexity, and said something about "charity beginning at home," and "coming to want," and "harbouring idle hussies and their brats." But Andrew was peremptory, for his eye had glanced from the poor soldier's fatherless babe to the cherished creature at that time nestling in his own bosom. So the widow was "warmed and fed," and left a blessing on her benefactor, who, on his part, failed not to accompany his parting "God speed you," and the small piece of money which accompanied it, with an impressive lecture on the sinfulness of want and pauperism, and a comfortable assurance, that they were always deserved manifestations of divine displeasure.

Just as the litttle Josiah had attained his second year, Andrew Cleaves was called on to resign the wife of his bosom, who went the way of all flesh, after a short but sharp illness. She had so fully realized all the calculations that had decided Andrew to choose her for his mate, that he regretted her loss very sincerely; but resignation, he justly observed, was the duty of a Christian, and Andrew was wonderfully resigned and composed, even in the early days of his bereavement, throwing out many edifying comments on the folly and sinfulness of immoderate grief, together with sundry opposite remarks, well befitting his own circumstances, and a few proverbial illustrations and observations, such as "Misfortunes never come alone, for his poor dame was taken at night, and the old gander was found dead in the morning." Moreover, he failed not to sum up, as sources of rational consolation, "that it had pleased the

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Lord to spare her till the boy ran alone, and Daisey's calf was weaned, and all the bacon cured; and he himself had become fully competent to supply her place in the manufacturing of cheeses." So Andrew buried his wife and was comforted.

And, from the night of her death, he took his little son to his own bed, and laid him in his mother's place; and long and fervent were the prayers he ejaculated before he went to rest, kneeling beside his sleeping child; and cautious and tender as a mother's kiss, was that he imprinted on its innocent brow before he turned himself to slumber. Early in the morning an elderly widow, who had been used to cook his victuals, and set the cottage to rights before his marriage, came to take up and tend the boy, and get breakfast for him and his father, and she was now detained through the day, in the care of household concerns, and of the motherless little one. She was a good and tender foster-mother, and a careful manager withal, falling readily into Andrew's ways and likings, a woman of few words, and content with little more than her victuals and drink—and, inoffensive and taciturn as she was, he had a feeling of snug satisfaction in locking her out every evening when she betook herself to sleep at her own cottage. Then was Andrew wont to turn back to his own solitary hearth, with a feeling of self gratulation, not evincing much taste for social enjoyment, or any disposition again to barter his secure state of single-blessedness for a chance in the matrimonial lottery—from which, having drawn a first-rate prize, it would have been presumptuous to expect a second.

What with old Jenny's help, and his own notability, (he had not lived so long a bachelor without having acquired some skill in housewifery,) he got on very comfortably; and for a living object to care for, and to love, the little Josiah was to him wife, child, companion—every thing! So Andrew continued faithful as a widowed turtle to the memory of his deceased Dinah; and the motherless boy throve as lustily as if he had continued to nestle under the maternal wing. He was, in truth, a fine sturdy little fellow, full of life and glee, and "quips and cranks, and *mirthful* smiles,"

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and yet as like Andrew as "two peas." "The very moral of the father," said old Jenny, "only not so solemnlike." He had Andrew's jetty eyebrows, and black lustrous eyes, deep set under the broad projecting brow; but they looked out with roguish mirth from their shadowy cells, and the raven hair, that, like his father's, almost touched his straight eye-brows, clung clustering over them, and round his little fat poll, in a luxuriance of rich, close, glossy curls. His mouth was shaped like his father's, too; but Andrew's could never, even in childhood, have relaxed into such an expression of dimpled mirth, as the joyous laugh burst out—that sound of infectious gladness which rings to one's heart's core like a peal of merry bells. He *was* a fine little fellow! and at five years old the joy and pride of the doting father, not only for his vigorous beauty, but for his quick parts and wonderful forwardness in learning; for Andrew was a scholar, and had early taken in hand his son's education; so that, at the age above mentioned, he could spell out passages in any printed book, could say the Lord's Prayer and the Belief, and great part of the Ten Commandments, though he stuck fast at the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Athanasian Creed, which his father had thought it expedient to include among his theological studies. It was the proudest day of Andrew Cleaves's whole life, when for the first time he led his little son by the hand along the aisle of his parish-church into his own pew, and lifted up the boy upon the seat beside him, where (so well had he been tutored, and so profound was his childish awe) he stood stock-still, with his new red Prayer-book held open in his two little chubby hands, and his eyes immovably fixed, not on the book, but on his father's face. All eyes were fixed upon the boy, for, verily, a comical little figure did the young Josiah exhibit that Sabbath-day. Andrew Cleaves had a sovereign contempt for petticoats, (though of course he had never hinted as much in his late spouse's hearing,) and could ill brook that his son and heir, a future lord of creation, should be ignominiously trammelled even in swaddling-clothes. So soon, therefore, as a change was feasible—far sooner than old Jenny allowed it to be so—the boy was

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emancipated from his effeminate habiliments, and made a man of—a little man complete, in coat, waistcoat, and breeches, made after the precise fashion of his father's, who had set the tailor to work in his own kitchen, under his own eye, and on a half-worn suit of his own clothes, out of which enough remained in excellent preservation to furnish a complete equipment for the man in miniature. So little Josiah's Sunday-going suit consisted of a long-tailed coat of dark-blue broad cloth, lapelled back, with two rows of large gilt basket-work buttons, a red plush waistcoat, (the month being July,) brown corduroy breeches, with knee-buckles, grey worsted hose, and large new square-toed shoes, with a pair of heavy silver buckles, once belonging to his mother, that, covering his little feet across, like a couple of pack-saddles, touched the ground as he walked on either side of them. Add to this a stiff broad-brimmed beaver, (padded within all round to fit his tiny pate,) under the shadow of which the baby face was scarce discoverable, and the whole diminutive person moved like a walking mushroom.

Proud was the boy of his first appearance, so equipped, before the assembled congregation; and very proud was Andrew Cleaves, who felt as if now indeed he might assume unto himself, before the elders of his people, the honour of being father to a man-child.

From that day forth little Josiah, led in his father's hand, came regularly to church every Sabbath-day; but, alas! his after demeanour, during service, by no means realized the promise of that solemn propriety wherewith he comported himself on his first memorable appearance; and it soon required Andrew's utmost vigilance to rebuke and check his son's restless and mischievous propensities. Great was the father's horror and consternation on detecting him in the very act of making faces at the vicar himself, whose unfortunate obliquity of vision had excited the boy's monkey talent of mimicry; and at last the young rebel was suddenly and for ever deposed from his lofty station on the seat beside his father, for having taken a sly opportunity of pinning the hind bow of an old lady's bonnet to the back of her pew, whereby her bald pate was cruelly exposed to the

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eyes of the congregation, as she rose up, with unsuspecting innocence, at the Gloria Patri.

At home, too, Andrew soon discovered that his parental cares were likely to multiply in full proportion to his parental pleasures. Little Josiah was quick at learning, but of so volatile a spirit, that, in the midst of one of his father's finest moral declamations, or most elaborate expoundings, he would dart off after a butterfly, or mount astride on the old sheep-dog; and at last, when sharply rebuked for his irreverent antics, look up piteously in his father's face, and yawn so disconsolately, that Andrew's iron jaws were fain to sympathize with the infectious grimace, to their owner's infinite annoyance. At meal times it was wellnigh impossible to keep his little hands from the platter while his father pronounced a long and comprehensive grace, with an especial supplication for the virtues of abstinence and forbearance; and so far from continuing to take pride in the manly dignity of his raiment, it became necessary to dock his waistcoat-flaps, and the long skirts of his week-day coat, the pockets of the former being invariably crammed with pebbles, munched apples, worms, brown sugar, snails, cockchafers, and all manner of abominations; and on the latter it was not only his laudable custom to squat himself in the mud and mire, but, being of an imitative and inventive genius, and having somewhere read a history of the beavers, he forthwith began to practise their ingenious mode of land-carriage, by dragging loads of rubbish behind him on the aforesaid coat-tails, as he slid along in a sitting posture.

Greatly did Andrew Cleaves marvel, that a son of his should evince such unseemly propensities, having perpetually before his eyes an example of sober seriousness and strict propriety. But, nevertheless, he doted on the boy with unabated fondness—toiled for him—schemed for him—waked for him—dreamt of him—lived in him—*idolized* him!—Yes!—Andrew Cleaves, who had been wont to hold forth so powerfully on the sin and folly of idol worship, *he* set up in his heart an earthly image, and unconsciously exalted it above his Maker.

Andrew's cottage was situated on the extreme verge of a

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large and lonely common, which separated it from the village of Redburn, and it was also at a considerable distance from any other habitation. He had taken upon himself his son's early instruction, and it was consequently easy enough to maintain a point which he had much at heart, that of keeping the boy aloof from all intercourse with the village children, or indeed with any persons, save himself and old Jenny, except in *his* company. This system, to which he rigidly adhered, had a very unfavourable effect on his own character, repressing in it all those kindlier and more social feelings which had almost struggled into preponderance, when the hard surface was partially thawed by the new sense of parental tenderness, and while his son was yet a cradled babe, and he had nothing to apprehend for him on the score of evil communications. But now he guarded him as misers guard their gold—as he himself, alas! hoarded the mammon of unrighteousness, (his secondary object,) but "solely for his darling's sake." So Andrew compromised the matter with his conscience, and so he would have answered to any enquiring Christian.

The boy, though thus debarred from all communication save with his father and old Jenny, was nevertheless as happy as any child of the same age. He had never known the pleasures of association with youthful playmates—he was full of animal spirits and invention, particularly in the science of mischief;—he completely ruled old Jenny in the absence of his father; and, except at lesson times and on Sabbaths, had acquired more ascendency over that stern father himself, than Andrew anyway suspected.

The interval between the boy's fourth and seventh year was, perhaps, the happiest in the whole lives of father and son; but that state of things could not continue. Andrew Cleaves had aspiring views for his young Josiah—and it had always been his intention to give him "the best of learning;" in furtherance of which purpose he had looked about him, almost from the hour of the boy's birth, for some respectable school wherein to place him, when his own stock of information became incompetent to the task of teaching. He had at last pitched upon a grammar-school

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in the county town, about five miles from his own habitation, where the sons of respectable tradesmen and farmers were boarded and taught upon moderate terms; though, to do Andrew justice, *saving* considerations were not paramount with him, when his son's welfare was concerned, and he was far more anxious to ascertain that his morals, as well as his learning, would be strictly attended to. On that head he *of course* received the most satisfactory assurances from the master of the "Academy for Young Gentlemen;" and having likewise ascertained that the boy would have an ample allowance of wholesome food, it is not wonderful that Andrew Cleaves threw the "moderate terms" as the third weight into the scale of determination.

The greater number of the boys—those whose parents were dwellers in the town of C——, were only day-boarders; but some, whose families lived at a greater distance, went home on Saturdays only, to spend the Sabbath-day; and it was Andrew's private solace to think that the separation from his child would be rendered less painful by that weekly meeting. It had taken him full six months, and sundry journeyings to and fro, to make all his arrangements with the master. But at last they were completed, and nothing remained but the trial—the hard, hard trial—of parting with that creature who constituted his all of earthly happiness. Andrew was a hard man, little susceptible of tender weakness in his own nature, and ever prone to contemn and censure in others the indulgence of any feeling incompatible (in his opinion) with the dignity of a man and the duty of a Christian.

His God was not a God of love; and when he rebuked the natural tears of the afflicted—the submissive sorrows of the stricken heart—it was in blind forgetfulness of him who wept over the grave of his friend Lazarus. He had honoured his parents during their lifetime, and buried them with all decent observance; but with no other outward demonstration of woe, than a more sombre shade on his always severe countenance. "The desire of his eyes" was taken from him, and he had shown himself a pattern of pious resignation. And now he was to part with his

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son for a season, and who could doubt that the temporary sacrifice would be made with stoical firmness? And so it should verily, was Andrew's purpose; upon the strength of which he proceeded, with old Jenny's advice and assistance, to make requisite preparation for the boy's equipment. Nay, he was so far master of himself, as to rebuke the old woman's foolish fondness when she remarked, "how lonesome the cottage would seem when the dear child was gone;" and he expressed himself the more wrathfully, from the consciousness of a certain unwonted rising in his throat, which half choked him as she went "maundering on."

To the child himself, he had not yet breathed a syllable of his intentions, and yet more than twice or thrice he had taken him on his knee, to tell him of the approaching change. But something always occurred to defer the execution of his purpose—the boy stopped his mouth with kisses—or he prattled so there was no getting in a word edgeways—or it would do as well in the evening, when he came home from his fields. But then, the young one came running to meet him, and had always so much to ask and tell, that the important communication was still delayed. In the morning, before he rose from his pillow, he would tell it as the boy lay still by his side; but while the secret was actually on his lips, his little bed-fellow crept into his bosom, and nestled there so lovingly, that his voice died away, as it were, into the very depths of his heart, and the words were yet unspoken. At length he hit upon an opportunity, which was sure to present itself ere long. The next time Josiah was idle and refractory at his lessons—that very moment, in the strength of indignation, he would tell him he was to leave his father's roof, and be consigned to the rule of strangers. Alas! that fitting occasion was in vain laid wait for—Josiah truly did his best to forward it, but the father could not be angry—and he could not speak.

At last, seriously angry with himself—humiliated at the triumph of human weakness, to which he had hitherto boasted himself superior—Andrew departed one morning to his labours earlier than usual, having deputed to Jenny the task, to which he felt himself unequal. All that morning the fa-

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ther's thoughts were with his child. He pictured to himself the first burst of distress—the first grievous surprise—the inconsolable sorrow at the thought of parting—and he longed to return and clasp the boy to his heart, and to kiss off the tears from his dear face, and comfort him with soothing words and indulgent promises.

But still as the fond impulse rose within him, he wrestled with it manfully, and lashed on his team, and laid his hand upon the plough, as if to support himself in resolute forbearance. No wonder the furrows Andrew traced that day were the most uneven he had ever drawn, since the hour he first guided his own plough on his own acres. He kept firm to his post, however, till the usual dinner hour, and even left the field with his laborers, without deviating from his accustomed firm, deliberate step; but when they had turned out of sight to their own homes, then Andrew speeded on rapidly towards his cottage, till just within sight of it he spied the little Josiah running forward to meet him. Then again he slackened his pace, for his heart shrunk from the first burst of the boy's impetuous sorrow.

But those apprehensions were soon exchanged for feelings of a more irritable nature, when he perceived that the merry urchin bounded towards him with more than his usual exuberant glee; and the first words he distinguished were,—"Father, father, I'm going to school!—I'm going to school!—I'm going to town, father!—I'm going to school? When shall I go? Shall I go to-morrow? Shall I take my new clothes, father? And my hoop, and my lamb, and old Dobbin?"

A bitter pang it was that shot through Andrew's heart at that moment—a bitter revulsion of feeling was that he experienced. He made no allowance for the volatile nature of childhood—its restless desire of change and love of novelty—its inconsideration—its blissful recklessness of the future. He read only in the boy's exulting rapture, that this his only, only child—the only creature he had ever loved—who had slept in his bosom, and prattled on his knee, and won from him such fond indulgences as he could scarce excuse to his own conscience—this darling of his age, now on the eve of

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a first separation, broke out into extravagant joy at the prospect, and testified no anxiety but to take with him his play-things, and his dumb favourites. The sudden revulsion of feeling came upon Andrew like an ice-bolt, and there he stood motionless, looking sternly and fixedly on the poor child, who was soon awed and silenced by his father's unwonted aspect, and stood trembling before him, fearing he knew not what. At last he softly whispered, sidling closely up, and looking earnestly and fearfully in his father's face, "Shall I *not* go to school then? Old Jenny said I should."

That second, quiet interrogatory restored to Andrew the use of speech, and the mastery over all his softer feelings. "Yes," he replied, taking the boy's hand, and grasping it firmly within his own, as he led him homeward, "yes, Josiah, you *shall* go to school—you have been kept too long at home: to-morrow is the Sabbath, but on Monday you shall go. On Monday, my child, you shall leave your father."

That last sentence, and a something he perceived, but comprehended not, in his father's voice and manners, painfully affected the boy, and he burst into tears, and, clinging to his father's arm, sobbed out, "But *you* will go with me, father; and you will come and see me every day, will you not? And I shall soon come home again."

That artless burst of natural affection fell like balm on Andrew's irritated feelings, and he caught up his child to his bosom, and blessed and kissed him, and then they "reasoned together:" and the father told his boy how he should fetch him home every Saturday with Dobbin; and how they should still go hand-in-hand to church on the Sabbath; and how his lamb, and the grey colt, should be taken care of in his absence; and his hoop and other toys might be carried with him to school.

Then the child began again his joyous prattle, with now and then a sob between; and the father kissed his wet glowing cheek, carrying him all the way home in his arms; and thus lovingly they entered the little garden, and the pretty cottage, and sat down side by side, to the neat homely meal old Jenny had provided.

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CHAPTER XIV.

ANDREW CLEAVES.

The Sabbath-day passed on as usual; its wonted calm, unbroken even by Josiah's eager anticipation of the morrow—for so early and so severely had Andrew inculcated the duty of a grave and solemn demeanour on the Lord's day, that the child had learned to imitate his father's serious and mortified aspect, and his joyous laugh was rarely heard ringing through the house during those twelve long tedious hours; and, contrary to his usual vivacious habits, he was always anxious to go to bed very early on the Sabbath evening, and he had already been some hours in a sweet and profound sleep, when his father came to bed on that last night preceding the important Monday.

If ever prayers were breathed from the heart, such were those of Andrew Cleaves, when, by that pale light of a cloudless moon, he knelt down at the solemn hour, beside the pillow of his sleeping child, who "looked like an angel as he slept," the tender moonbeams playing like a glory round those young innocent temples. Yes, if ever prayer came direct from the heart, such was that of Andrew Cleaves at that solemn hour; yet never before were his whispered aspirations so broken, so faintly murmured, so devoid of all the graces of speech and metaphor. Over and over again his lips murmured—"Bless my child—bless him, oh Lord!" and then the words died away, and the heart only spoke, for its eloquence was unutterable; yet he continued near an hour in that holy communion; and when at length he rose up from his knees, and, bending over his child, bowed his head to imprint the accustomed kiss, large drops rolled down his rugged features, and fell on the soft glowing cheek of the little sleeper.

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Andrew Cleaves laid himself down to rest that night, with such thoughts as might, "if heaven had willed it," have matured even then to fruits of blessedness. But his time was not yet come. The rock was stricken, but as yet the waters gushed not freely out.

Daylight brought with it other thoughts, and more worldly feelings; and Andrew Cleaves rose up himself again, stout of heart and firm of purpose, remembering that he was to appear among men, and scorning to betray, before his fellow-creatures, any symptom of that tender weakness which he felt half humiliated at having yielded to in the sight of his Creator.

He roused the boy up hastily and cheerily, and hurried old Jenny in her breakfast preparations, and in completing the packing up of Josiah's box, and equipping him for his departure, and the new scene he was about to enter on, in a suit of bran new clothes, made, however, after the precise fashion of his first manly habiliments;—and Andrew himself was less methodical and deliberate than usual in his own proceedings, finding something to do, or to seek for, which hurried him hither and thither, with a bustling restlessness very unlike his general clock-work movements.

He sat scarce five minutes at his breakfast, and had not consumed half his morning's portion of oatmeal porridge, when he started off to draw out the cart, and harness old Dobbin; and the box was locked and brought out—and the boy rigged at all points, like a little hog in armour—and the horse and cart at the door—and all ready, though Andrew professed he had believed it later than it really was, by a full hour, and the sooner they were off the better—so cutting short, with peevish impatience, the blubbering adieu of poor Jenny—just as Josiah was beginning to sob out in concert—and saying, "Up wi' ye, my man," he jerked him suddenly into the cart, and mounting himself, drove off at a rate that caused old Jenny to exclaim, "Lord save us, for certain master's bewitched!"—and greatly inconvenienced Dobbin, whose usual paces were every whit as sedate and deliberate as her master's.

It is not to be inferred, however, that he continued to urge

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on the venerable beast to those unnatural exertions throughout the whole five miles. Andrew was so far a humane man, that he was "merciful to his beast," and once out of sight of home, permitted her to fall into her old jog-trot, taking the opportunity, after clearing his throat with sundry hums and ha's, to hold forth very lengthily to his young companion on the new course of life he was about to enter on—the new duties he would have to fulfil—the zeal for learning—aptness, diligence, and perseverance, that would be expected from him—the care he was to take of his clothes, and his new Bible and Prayer-book, and the caution with which it would behove him to select intimates among his schoolfellows, many of whom might be wild, riotous chaps, given to such wicked ways as Andrew trembled to think of.

The boy had listened to this edifying exhortation—which had held on through four interminable miles, (for Andrew was always soothed and inspired by the sound of his own droning preachments,)—just as he had been wont to listen to the Rev. Mr. Leadbetter's hydra-headed sermons—in silence indeed, but with most disconsolate yawnings and twitchings, and indescribable fidgetings; but when his father came to the *head* of *Schoolfellows*, his attention was instantly excited; and suddenly brightening up, and skipping over the prohibitory clauses of the discourse, he broke in on it with an enquiry of, whether the boys were like to be good hands at hoops and marbles?

An interruption so ill-timed and incongruous, would have drawn down a sharp rebuke on the heedless offender; but just as it was breaking from Andrew's lips, a sudden turn of the road brought them to the top of the last hill, overlooking the town of C——, which now opened at a short distance in full view of the travellers.

There—the father remembered he was to leave his boy—so the severe words died away upon his lips—and the child looked, for the first time in his life, on the wonderful labyrinth of houses, churches, markets, and manufactories, that constitute a considerable county-town; and his amazement and delight broke forth with inexpressible vehemence. "Ay, it's all very fine, my man!" said the father, shaking his head;

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"a fine thing to look at, yon great city; and ye've seen nothing like it afore, poor innocent lamb; but God keep ye from the evil ways that are in it, and from the tents of the ungodly!" So groaned Andrew; but nevertheless he drove on with his precious charge towards the tents of ungodliness, for he had worldly and ambitious views for the boy, and they were not to be forwarded in the desert.

The road wound quite round the brow of the hill in a somewhat retrogade direction, so as to alter the otherwise precipitous descent into one more gradual and easy. On one side arose a wall of chalky cliff; on the other a steep slope of slippery down—so Andrew guided old Dobbin slowly and carefully round the promontory's brow; and on doubling the point, an unexpected and unwelcome sight saluted him. Just beneath, on a sort of green platform half-way down the declivity, had stood, from times beyond the memory of man, an awful fixture, from which the eminence derived its designation of "Gallows-Hill." Round that fatal tree, and quite down the remaining descent, and ranged, ledge above ledge, up the chalky summit, the whole population of C—— seemed now assembled; yet such was the stillness of the vast multitude, that no sound indicative of the scene they were approaching, had reached the ears of Andrew or his son, till they came in full sight of it. Andrew Cleaves instinctively tightened his rein and halted abruptly, and the boy jumped up and caught hold of his father's arm, but uttered not a word, as he looked down breathlessly on the condensed living mass. At last he drew a long, deep inspiration, and looked round in his father's face, the seriousness of which had darkened into unusual severity. Rather in answer to his own momentary surprise, than in reply to the boy's enquiring looks, Andrew uttered, in his deepest, lowest tone, "Ay, I see how it is—'Sizes are over, and there's an execution going forward. So perish the guilty from the land!"

Andrew Cleaves would have been a sturdy champion for that faith, in the strength of which the valiant Bishop Don Hieronymo urged on the slaughter of the Infidels, with the shout of—"Smite them, for the love of God!" And under

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the Jewish dispensation, he would never have spared Agag, whatever he might have done by "the best of the sheep and oxen." So now twice over—yea, three several times, he fervently ejaculated—"So perish the guilty from the land!" concluding the third repetition with a sonorous "Amen!" which was softly re-echoed by the tremulous voice of the unconscious child, who having been accustomed at home and at church always to repeat the word after the clerk or his father, now chimed in mechanically with the pious aspiration. "Amen!" quoth Andrew, and whipped on Dobbin, though rather perplexed at having to make his way through the close-wedged multitude. Andrew Cleaves, though a severe, was not a cruel man. Though a zealous advocate for the extreme rigour of the law, he took no delight in witnessing the actual execution of its dread sentence; neither did he desire that his innocent companion should thus prematurely behold a sight so awful. Therefore he pushed on as fast as possible, hoping to get clear of the crowd before the arrival of the Sheriff and the mournful cavalcade, which was slowly approaching. As they passed close to the foot of the gibbet, Josiah, glancing upwards at the fatal tree, shrunk close to his father, as if he would have grown into his very side; and now their onward progress became more difficult—almost impossible. The fatal cart was close at hand, and the curious people thronged about it to catch a passing view of the condemned. It was in vain that Andrew urged on the old mare with voice and lash: she could not force a passage through the living wall, so he was fain to take patience, and draw up to the side of the road till the sad pageant had passed by. The crowd which had arrested his progress, impeded also the advance of the cart with its wretched burden; and during the time of its tedious approach, Andrew gathered from some of the bystanders, that the criminal, who was that day to meet an ignominious and untimely fate, was a mere youth, having barely attained his twentieth year; that he had been a boy of fair promise, till seduced by bad company, and evil example, into irregular ways and lawless practices; which, proceeding from bad to worse, had at last involved him in

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the crime for which he was about to suffer, and which would surely bring down to the grave with sorrow the grey hairs of his unhappy parents, whose only child he was.

"Maybe they'll have to blame themselves for the ill deeds of their offspring. Maybe they'll have fallen short in setting him a good example, and in bringing him up in the fear of the Lord, and the renunciation of sin and Satan," sententiously observed Andrew, firmly compressing his lips, and contracting his dark brows into their sternest and most awful expression.

"You're quite wrong there, master," indignantly retorted a woman, who was squeezed up close to the side of the cart, and whose hard-favoured countenance exhibited an expression little less saturnine than Andrew's; and, to use the vulgar phrase, far more "*evil*."—"You're quite wrong there, any way. Better Christians and honester folk never broke bread than that poor lad's parents; ay, and better parents too, though maybe a thought too proud and fond of him, for pride will have a downfall; and I always told 'em Joe wanted a tight hand over him; but it's too late now. God help 'em, poor souls, I say!"

"Amen! mistress," quoth Andrew. "Nevertheless, punishment is wholesome, for example's sake; and it's right guilt should suffer; and verily the parents of the lad, if they be, as you say, pious Christians, should rather rejoice in their affliction, and praise the Lord, that he is cut short in his wickedness."

"I say, 'praise the Lord!' indeed, that their only child should come to the gallows! A fine thing to praise God on!" growled the woman—yet more indignantly. "I wonder what some folks' feelings are made of? I say, 'praise the Lord,' indeed!"

"Woman!" snorted Andrew; but his expostulatory sentence was cut short by her angry vehemence, as she continued, in a taunting key—

"Maybe you'll like, 'for example's sake,' to see that pretty lamb by your side with the rope round his neck some day. Maybe you'll praise the Lord for that, master!" and so saying, she stretched out her long bony arm, and laid her

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hand on the shoulder of the shuddering child; and when Andrew turned to rebuke her, and their eyes met, the expression of hers struck into his heart such a sensation of strange uneasiness, as caused him suddenly to draw the child beyond her reach; and long afterwards, for many and many a day, and when months and years had passed by, and the recollection of that scene had faded, and no particular circumstance occurred to revive it, that woman's face, and that peculiar look, would come across him, and again strike to his heart the same feeling of indefinite horror, which impelled him, at the moment he actually encountered it, to snatch the boy from within the evil influence of her touch.

But, at the time, that painful sensation was as momentary as vivid, for all further altercation was cut short by the pressure of the living mass, among which a general agitation, and a low confused murmur took place, as it fell back on either side, to make way for the fatal cart. The woman left off in the midst of a volley of revilings on Andrew's hardheartedness, in her anxiety to press back in time to secure a snug place near the gibbet, where she might see all in comfort. And Andrew held his peace, and drew still closer to the road-side, as the cart came slowly on; and as vulgar curiosity was not one of his besetting sins—(Andrew Cleaves's was by no means a vulgar mind, nor was his character a common one)—his eye followed not the broad eager gaze of the multitude, but looking downward, with serious, and not unbecoming solemnity, he raised his head only for an instant, and as it were involuntarily, just as the cart came abreast of his own vehicle, and the wretched criminal was so near, that in the deep stillness which had succeeded that prelusive murmur, his short, quick, laborious respiration, broken at intervals by a convulsive sob, was distinctly audible; and transient as was Andrew's involuntary glance, the object it encountered was not one soon to be forgotten. It was a sight, indeed, to touch a father's heart; and who could have beheld it unmoved?

The culprit, as has been said, was a mere youth. He appeared scarcely to have numbered twenty summers. A

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tall slim lad he was, almost effeminate in the transparent delicacy of his complexion, the profusion of fair silky hair which waved in disorder about his blue-veined temples, and the sickly whiteness of his long thin hands, one of which hung lifelessly over the side of the cart, in which he sat erect and stiffened, as if under the influence of some benumbing spell, (his eyes only wandering with a bewildered stare,) and seemingly incapable of attending to the clergyman, who was seated by his side, occasionally reading to him a few sentences from the Book of Common Prayer, and mildly exhorting him to join in some pious ejaculation, or penitential verse.

At such times, indeed, the wretched boy looked for an instant towards the Book of Prayer, and his lips moved, but no articulate sound proceeded from them. Those quivering lips were parched and deadly white, but a spot of vivid crimson burned on his hollow cheek, and the expression of his large blue eyes, distended to an unnatural roundness, was exceedingly ghastly. Occasionally he looked quickly and eagerly from side to side, and in one of those hurried glances his eyes met Andrew's, and at that moment his frame was convulsed with an universal tremor, and he faintly articulated the word "Father!" Right glad was Andrew Cleaves when the cart with its miserable burden, the sheriffs with their attendants, and the whole dismal train, having passed onward, the people thronged after them to the place of execution, and he was once more at liberty to pursue his way, which he did with all possible expedition, urging on Dobbin with an energy he had never before ventured to exert on that steep declivity. But the sound of the agitated multitude, (that heavy, awful sound, like the swell of distant ocean,) was still audible, and Andrew speeded to get beyond it, and to reach C——, now within the distance of a few furlongs. All this while not a word had passed between the father and son; but just before they entered the town, Andrew looked round upon his child, who had remained, as it were, glued on to his side, both his little arms fast locked round one of his father's. He was very pale, and trembled like a leaf; and when his father spoke to him, and he tried

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to answer, the attempt produced only a deep choking sob, that burst out as if his very breath had been pent up for ages; one or two hysterical catches succeeded, a broken word or two, the brimming eyes overflowed, and then the little heart was relieved and lightened—Oh! would the burden of elder bosoms was as easily breathed out! And he slackened his grasp of his father's arm, and began to breathe and prattle freely.

Andrew fairly enough improved the opportunity of that awful sight they had just witnessed, by pointing out to his young companion the dreadful consequences of vice, and the danger of yielding to temptation, even by the most trifling deviation from moral and religious rectitude. They had just reached the entrance of C——, so the lecture was necessarily concluded; but Andrew failed not to wind up his exhortation against the early inroads of sin, by inveighing, especially, against the particular guilt of waste and extravagance, charging his son to take extraordinary care of his new clothes, not to scuff out his shoes by unnecessary activity and acts of wanton mischief, nor to squander away his pocket-money in idle toys and sensual indulgences. The latter charge was particularly requisite, as Josiah took with him to school the capital of three sixpences in silver, and was to receive the stipend of two-pence every Monday morning. He was, moreover, enjoined to keep an exact account of his expenditure; and his father presented him, for that purpose, with a long narrow ledger-looking account-book, all ruled and lined with red ink, under the heads of pounds, shillings, and pence.

Andrew's last charge was abruptly put an end to, by the rumbling of his cart-wheels over the stones of the High-Street; and in two minutes they had turned out of it into the Market-place, then through a long, narrow, back street, and at length drew up before a tall red house, with a bright green door, having on it a large plate of resplendent brass, whereon was engraved with sundry flourishes—

"THE COMMERCIAL ACADEMY FOR
YOUNG GENTLEMEN,
KEPT BY THE REV. JEREMIAH JERK."

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All matters concerning the admission of Josiah had been settled and re-settled, over and over again, between the careful father and the Rev. Mr. Jerk; so the former had nothing more to do than to consign his precious deposit into the care of that respectable pedagogue, which transfer was the affair of a moment, for Andrew had his private reasons for brief leave-taking; so setting down his son at the door of his new abode, (where the master took the hand of his little pupil with that peculiar tenderness of manner so insinuating to the breaking hearts of new comers,) he laid his hand on the boy's head, and with an abrupt "God be with you, my man!" was in his seat again, and off, and round the corner of the street, before the tears that had been swelling up into the little fellow's eyes had burst over their lids, and down his pale, quivering face, in all that agony of grief excited by the first trial of the heart—the first pang of the first parting.

However cogent were the motives which decided Andrew Cleaves to decline the Rev. Mr. Jerk's proffered hospitality, he was by no means in haste to get home that day. He had business to transact with sundry corn-factors and graziers, and various other persons in C———, and altogether found —or made—so much to detain him there, though his concerns were wont to be more expeditiously transacted, that it was evening before he re-mounted his rumbling vehicle, and put Dobbin in motion, and quite dark before he reached the door of his own cottage. It was a cold evening, too—a cold, cheerless, bleak, March evening, and an east wind and a sleety rain had been driving in his face all the way home; and as he approached the cottage, its bright, blazing hearth glowed invitingly through the low casement, and reflected a red cheerful light on the half-open door, and streamed forward like a smile of welcome along the narrow gravel walk to the entrance wicket. And yet Andrew was in no haste to re-enter his comfortable home. Some hearts may guess why he lingered on the cold heath—such as have felt the pang of returning to an abode, when all is as it was—except —that the light of life is extinguished—the jewel gone—the shrine left desolate.

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But at last poor old Jenny came hurrying out at the sound of the cart-wheels, with her humble welcome, and wonderment at his late return, and offers of assistance in unharnessing Dobbin, that her master might the sooner come in and warm himself. Her well-meant kindness was rather gruffly declined, so she was fain to retreat within-doors, and leave "Master," as she muttered to herself in not the best of humours, "to please himself his own way," (the most difficult thing in the world, by-the-by, to *some* folks in *some* moods;) and when at last he approached the fireside, and she ventured a cautious question as to how he left the dear child, she was snapped off with an injunction to mind her own business, and not trouble him with foolish questions. So, having set down his supper on the small table already prepared with its clean white cloth, and partaken of the meal in unsocial silence, she was dismissed to her own hovel, with an intimation that Andrew would himself put away the fragments of the repast, and had no need of her further services that night.

What were Andrew Cleaves's special reasons for ridding himself so impatiently of old Jenny's company that evening, and what were his cogitations after he had locked her out, and himself in, and resumed his former station by the hearth and the little supper-table, we cannot exactly ascertain, though it is to be presumed they differed widely from those feelings of snug satisfaction, with which, after the old lady had set by him his pipe and his small glass of ale, he had been wont to lock her civilly out, and re-seat himself in his comfortable corner, with the sweet consciousness that his child was sleeping peacefully in the little adjoining chamber, and that he should himself lie down to rest on the same bed, when the cuckoo flung open his small door in the old Dutch clock, and warned him it was time to retire.

Very different must have been his cogitations the night he dismissed poor Jenny so impatiently—for when the cuckoo warned, he still sat on unheeding, with his arms folded, his eyes fixed on the cold fireless hearth, where no spark had glimmered for the last half hour—the pipe unlit, and the small glass of ale still untasted. But when the hour

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actually struck, it aroused him from his comfortless abstraction; and, starting and shivering with a sensation of cold to which he had been till then insensible, he hastily swallowed down his temperate draught, and taking up the end of the candle, now flaring in its socket, and moving with the noiseless stealthy step acquired by long habits of carefulness for the slumbers of his little bedfellow, he entered his now solitary chamber, and shut himself within it—and what were his thoughts that night, his feelings, and his prayers, may be guessed by some hearts, but perhaps not fully conceived by any.

It would be hard to say whether the ensuing Saturday was more eagerly looked forward to by father or son. Certain it is, that when the morning of that day arrived, Andrew Cleaves was in no less haste to be gone, than when he had harnessed old Dobbin to the cart so expeditiously on the preceding Monday. But when he reached C——, it was still too early to call for his boy; for Andrew, with all his impatience, would not on any account have anticipated the precise moment when the half-holiday commenced—so he trafficked away the intervening time at his different places of call, and drew up the cart at the door of Mr. Jerk's academy, just as the "young gentlemen" had risen from their Saturday's commons of scrap-pie and stick-jaw—certain savoury preparations not enumerated in the catalogue of that scientific professor Monsieur Ude, nor perhaps recommended by the late Dr. Kitchiner, but quite familiar to the palate of provincial schoolboys. Little Josiah, having just risen from the aforesaid banquet, came running to the door at the sound of the cart-wheels, choking with joy and the last huge mouthful of tenacious compound. In a moment he was up in his father's arms, and hugging him so tight round the neck that Andrew was fain to cry out.

"Well, well, my man! but you'll not throttle your old dad, will ye? Have you been a good boy, Joey?"

Joey answered with a second hug, and the usher, who stood smirking at the door, satisfactorily certified the same; so the boy was sent to wash his greasy face and hands, and fetch his hat and little bundle of Sunday clothes, and then

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his father lifted him up into the cart, and turning old Dobbin, and giving him the sign of departure, a brisk cherup and a propelling stamp, in a few minutes they were fairly out of C——, and on their glad way to the cottage. What were the boy's acclamations of delight at the first sight of its curling smoke, and dark brown thatch—and how, in spite of all Andrew's endeavours to set him right, he persisted in miscalculating time and space—and how often he fidgeted up and down on the seat—and how he took a heap of chalk in a distant field for the grey colt—and a flannel petticoat hung out to dry, for old Jenny *in propria persona*—and how his father went on pointing out the folly and unprofitableness of such crude guesses and rash assertions—and how the boy went on making them thick and threefold—those will be at no loss to conceive who have ever accompanied a lively urchin to his own home, on his first return after his first week's schooling.

They may also picture to themselves the actual arrival—little Joey actually at home again—smothering old Jenny with kisses—squeezing the cat to a thread-paper—scampering down the garden to see if his beans were come up—unhitching his hoop from the nail, and flinging it away to run and see whether the grey colt was in the home croft—scrambling upon the back of his unbroken favourite, and racing round the field holding on by its mane, not a jot the worse—as a finale—for being pitched right into the privet hedge, from whence, half rolling, half scrambling out into the garden, he came crawling up the gravel walk on all-fours, with that characteristic disregard of seriousness and propriety, which had so early evinced itself, in despite of his father's solemn admonitions and decorous example. Fortunately, on the present occasion, Andrew was absent unharnessing the mare, and there was nothing new to Jenny in the uncouth performance. When the first ebullition of joy had subsided, (or rather when the animal spirits were sobered by actual exhaustion,) Josiah was well content to sit on his little stool beside his father, close by the bright warm hearth, while Jenny lit the candle, and set on the kettle, and brought out the cups and saucers, and Josiah's own basin, full of the red

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cow's milk, set by for him at that evening's milking, and the hot oat-cake, prepared for his especial regale. Then came the time for question and answer, and the father made minute enquiry into all school particulars, and his brow contracted a *little* when Joey confessed that his three sixpences were gone; yea, melted away, expended to the last fraction; yet *how*, he could by no means explain even to his own satisfaction, though he counted over and over again, upon his little fat fingers, sundry purchases of pies, crabs, gingerbread, marbles, and penny-worths of brown sugar—the enumeration whereof by no means tended to unknit the puckers in his father's brow, who for that time, however, contented himself with a *short* lecture on prodigal expenditure. But Joey's bosom laboured with matter more important, and his little heart swelled indignantly, as, with a quivering lip, and broken voice, he began to recount a long list of the insults and mortifications to which he had been subjected. He had been the butt of the whole school, twirled about like a tetotum, while one pretended to admire the fashion of his clothes, and another asked if they were made by Adam's tailor, and a third, if his hat had belonged to his great-grandfather; and with that, clapping it on the crown, till his little face was buried therein, and the broad brim rested on his shoulders, they called him little Amminadab, and bandying him about thus blindfold from one to the other, bade him complain to his dad, old "Praise-God Barebones;" and then the poor little boy revealed to the indignant eyes of his father and Jenny, an awful fracture, which, in the progress of these mischievous sports, had nearly dissevered one of his long coat-flaps, though the maid of the house had hastily tacked up the rent when his father called for him. Darker and darker Andrew's countenance had waxed, as he listened to the detail of these atrocities. Fearful was the contraction of his brow, the dilatation of his nostril, and the compression of his thin straight lips, when Joey, with an apprehensive side-glance and a suppressed tone of horror, pronounced the opprobious cognomen which had been so irreverently applied to his own sacred person; and by the time all was unfolded, he had wellnigh made up his mind

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that his son should return no more to the companionship of such daring reprobates. But Andrew Cleaves was seldom guilty of hasty decision; and when his displeasure had time to cool, and he found reason to be satisfied on the whole with Joey's further report of school progress, he thought it expedient to gulp down the unpalatable part of the narration, and to re-conduct his son to the Rev. Mr. Jerk's academy at the expiration of the Sabbath holiday.

That Sabbath had passed, like all former ones at the cottage, undistinguished by any additional gleam of cheerfulness or innocent recreation; and by the time it was half over, Joey began to think of the morrow and his return to school, with less repugnance than on the preceding evening. When Monday came, indeed, *home* was *home* again; and when the cart was ready, Joey ascended it rather dejectedly, consoling himself, however, with the thought, that Saturday would come round again in five days. Joey's calculations were correct for once:—Saturday came in five days, and he was fetched home again, and again returned rapturously to all its delights; and this time he had no grievance to relate; no, not though his broad-brimmed beaver had been clipped to a porringer, and his whole raiment exhibited such woeful dilapidation, as to set at nought all Jenny's repairing ingenuity; for both coat-flaps were gone —annihilated—irremediably abstracted—having been (as strongly indicated by certain suspicious appearances) actually singed off from the dishonoured garment. Still, in spite of Jenny's dismay, and his father's indignation, Joey persisted that all was well; and that he was now "very good friends with all his school-fellows; that they were only very funny fellows; and if they *had* burned off his coat-tails, a jacket was much more comfortable and convenient, especially for playing leapfrog."

In short, so perversely resigned was Master Joey to the docking which had been inflicted on his "good grey frieze," that it might have been shrewdly inferred he had had a hand in the operation. Happily for him, no such suspicion insinuated itself in his father's mind, who was, however, highly scandalized at the whole proceeding, and carried in-

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to effect his determination of laying it before the Rev. Mr. Jerk, when Josiah returned to school. A conference with that gentleman, had, however, the effect not only of prevailing on Andrew to pass over in silence the illegal curtailment of his son's week-day garb, but to permit the whole suit, as well as that set apart for Sundays, to be so far modernized as no longer to subject the boy to the practical jokes of his mischievous companions.

Happy had it been for Andrew Cleaves if his parental disquietude had been excited by no causes more serious than the aforementioned. But, alas! innumerable vexations sprang up to embitter that weekly reunion with his child, at first so delightful to both parties. Every succeeding Saturday diminished Joey's eagerness to return to his home, his former pleasures, and his dumb favourites. Every succeeding Sunday beneath the paternal roof, hung heavier upon him than the former; and as his impatience increased, his weariness became more apparent, and the lessons of manly independence he had begun to learn among his playfellows, manifested their fruits in such acts of contumacy, as called down stern rebuke, and sometimes severe chastisement, from the hitherto indulgent father—though Joey still stood too much in awe of the latter to venture on very open rebellion. So he became sullen, and silent, and incommunicative; and the unfortunate result of the father's undue severity, was to impress on the mind of the hitherto thoughtless and frank-tempered boy, the expediency of keeping to himself those idle frolics and venial trespasses, which, on his first return from school, had been boasted of, and confessed with an innocent confidence it should have been Andrew's care to confirm and encourage.

But Andrew, with all his fancied wisdom, was profoundly ignorant of the milder arts of training; and it was really on Scripture principles, erroneously applied, that, as the boy grew older, he thought it his duty to treat him with increased severity, and to rebuke, with uncompromising sternness, those venial lapses which, when candidly confessed, should have been commented on with lenient gentleness. Very soon Josiah learned to anticipate the Sabbath holiday as a

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weekly penance; and ample amends did he make himself for its dulness and restraint, when he found himself once more among his merry mates in the school playground; and very soon Joey was noted for the most daring spirit of the whole riotous assemblage—"Up to every thing"—the leader of all conspiracies—the foremost in all mischief—the most enterprizing in all dangers—and, what was more remarkable, the readiest and most ingenious at equivocations, inventions, and even unblushing falsehood, in cases of suspicion or detection. But as he became more knowing in all evil experience, his home deportment gradually manifested such an alteration as rejoiced the heart, and at length excited the highest hopes, of the credulous parent, whose boasted penetration failed him in detecting even the earliest artifices of infant cunning.

Joey's natural shrewdness soon found out the vulnerable points of his father's character; and that by affecting to copy his serious carriage and sententious speech, and now and then bringing home a new Psalm tune, or quoting a Scripture text, or relating, with well-feigned abhorrence, some anecdote of a reprobate schoolfellow, or pleading his want of some useful book, the old man was even prevailed on to undraw the strings of his canvass bag; and the young hypocrite's glee at obtaining substantial proofs of his ingenuity, was enhanced by his public triumph when he rehearsed, in the circle of his thoughtless schoolmates, the "capital acting" with which he had "come over the old gentleman."

In short, Master Joey's proficiency in these thriving arts was such as would have done credit to an older head, and the pupil of a more fashionable establishment; and as his attainments in the ostensible branches of his education really kept pace with his supernumerary accomplishments, all went on seemingly as well as heart could wish; and Andrew's ambitious views for his son's future advancement took firm root in the groundwork of these fair appearances.

Andrew Cleaves was not a man to lay down plans with reservations—to make provident allowance for unseen circumstances—or to leave much to Providence. Neither did

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he ever decide in haste; but having once come to a determination, it was seldom qualified with the mental proviso—"If it please God."

So well considered, so fully matured, and so irrevocably fixed, were his parental plans.

Though still abiding in his father's humble cottage, and (comparatively with many of his neighbours) farming in a small way, Andrew Cleaves had contrived to scrape together a sum of money, on which many a more dashing spirit would have set up a one-horse chay, taken out a shooting license, and drunk his bottle of port daily. But our farmer's ambition aimed at more remote objects. His savings were snugly deposited in a banking-house at C——, where, however, they by no means lay in unprofitable security; and on certain considerations arranged among the parties concerned, certain engagements had been entered into, that at a competent age, the young Josiah should be received as a clerk in the establishment; and from that office be further advanced, as after circumstances should warrant. Andrew uttered not a word of these projects to any human being, but he brooded over them in his own heart, till the grand object seemed so secure of attainment—so built up by prudence, and foresight, and calculation, as to bid defiance to all adverse circumstances of time, and change, and even of death itself. Poor man! And yet the uncertainty of life, and the vanity of worldly things, and the snares of riches and honours, were ever in his talk, and in his mortified seriousness of aspect.

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CHAPTER XV.

MATTERS went on smoothly on the whole, till Joey had been full two years at school, and his third summer holidays were approaching.

They were no longer anticipated with the same impatient longing which had drawn his heart towards home in his earlier school-days; but still there *were* home pleasures, and home indulgences, not attainable at school, and foremost of those ranked the privilege of being master of his own time, and of the grey colt, now become a well-disciplined, yet spirited steed, and destined to succeed to the functions of blind Dobbin, whose faithful career was fast drawing to a close.

In the mean time, Joey was permitted to call young Greybeard *his* horse, and was indulged in the pride and happiness of driving it himself the first time its services were put in requisition to fetch him home for the Christmas holidays. But when the summer vacation arrived, Joey's return was ordained to be in far other and less triumphant order. It so chanced, that on the very day of breaking up, a great annual fair was held at C——, which was looked forward to as a great festival by the boys whose parents and friends were resident there. These youngsters had vaunted its delights to Joey, and one especial friend and crony had invited his schoolfellow to go with him to his own house, and stay the two days of the fair. Now, it unluckily fell out that these identical two days occurred at a season most important to Andrew—just as his hay-harvest was getting in, and there was reason to expect the breaking up of a long spell of dry weather. So when Joey returned to school on the Monday, he was enjoined to tell his master,

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(with whom Andrew had no time for parlance,) that it would not be convenient for his father to fetch him home the ensuing Thursday, or indeed (on the account before mentioned) till the Saturday evening.

Andrew, engrossed by his rural concerns, had not thought of the fair, of which Joey took particular care not to remind him, as he well knew, that were he to give the least hint of his schoolfellow's invitation, and his own vehement longing to accept it, his father would fetch him away at the risk of sacrificing his whole hay crop, rather than leave him exposed to the danger of mixing in such a scene of abomination.

Master Joey, whose genius was of a very inventive nature, soon arranged in his own mind a neat little scheme, which would enable him to partake the prohibited delights, unsuspected by his father or the Rev. Mr. Jerk; so, trimming up to his own purpose his father's message to that gentleman, he ingeniously substituted for the request that he might be allowed to stay at school till Saturday, an intimation that he had obtained parental permission to accept his schoolfellow's invitation for the fair days, and that a neighbour's cart would take him home on Friday evening from the house of his friend's parents. Joey *had* his own plans for getting home too when the fun was over, and of managing matters so dexterously, that the truth should never transpire either to his father or master. The latter was easily imposed on by the boy's specious story; and when Thursday arrived, Joey, taking with him his little bundle of Sunday clothes, and his whole hoard of pence and sixpences, left school in high spirits with a party of his playmates.

Andrew Cleaves, meantime, got in his crops prosperously, and, exhausted as he was by a hard day's labour, set out on Saturday evening to fetch home the expecting boy. Poor Greybeard was tired also, for he too had worked hard all day, but he was a spirited willing creature, and went off freely, as if he knew his errand, and rejoiced at the thought of bringing home his young master. So the farmer and his vehicle arrived in good time at the door of the acade-

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my; but Andrew looked towards it in vain, and at the upper and lower windows, for the happy little face that had been wont to look out for him on such occasions.

The servant girl who opened the door looked surprised when Andrew enquired for his son; and still greater astonishment appeared in Mr. Jerk's countenance when he stepped forward and heard the reiterated enquiry. A brief and mutual explanation ensued—a grievous one to the agitated father, whose feelings may be well imagined—irritated as well as anxious feelings—for, on hearing the master's story, little doubt remained in his mind but that the truant was still harboured at the house of his favourite schoolfellow. But the intelligence promptly obtained there, was of a nature to create the most serious alarm. The parents of Josiah's friend informed Andrew that his boy *had* accompanied *their* son home when the school broke up on Thursday morning—they having willingly granted the request of the latter, that his playfellow might be allowed to stay with him till an opportunity occurred (of which he was in expectation) of his returning to his father's the next evening; that after dinner the two boys had sallied out into the fair together, from which *their* son returned about dark without his companion, with the account that they had been separated the latter part of the day; but that just as he began to tire of looking about for his school-fellow, Josiah had touched him hastily on the shoulder, saying, a neighbour of his father's who guessed he was playing truant, insisted on taking him home in his own cart, and that he *must* go that moment. This was all the boy had to tell—and that Josiah vanished in the crowd so suddenly, he could not see who was with him.

Vain were all possible enquiries in all directions. The distracted father could only learn further, that his child had been seen by many persons standing with his friend at many booths and stalls, and at last, quite alone in a show-booth belonging to a set of tight-rope and wire dancers, and of equestrian performers; with some of these he seemed to have made acquaintance, and among them he was last observed. That troop had quitted C—— the same night, and having fine horses and a light caravan, must have travelled expedi-

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tiously, and were probably already at a considerable distance; nor could the route they had taken be easily ascertained after they had passed through the turnpike, which had been about ten o'clock at night. Now it was that Andrew Cleaves, in the agony of his distress, would have given half his worldly substance to have obtained tidings—but the least favourable tidings, of his lost child; for dreadful thoughts and fearful imaginings suggested themselves, aggravating the horrors of uncertainty. There was no *positive* reason for belief that the boy had left C—— with the itinerant troop. A rapid river ran by the town—there was a deep canal also—and then the wharf, crowded with barges—between which ———But Andrew was not one to brood over imaginary horrors in hopeless inaction, and the opinion of others encouraged him to hope that his son had only been lured away by the equestrian mountebanks. With the earliest dawn, therefore, mounted on the young powerful grey, he was away from C——, and (according to the clew at last obtained) in the track of the itinerants. But they were far in advance, and, soon after passing through the turnpike, had struck into cross country roads and by-ways, so that the pursuit was necessarily tedious and difficult, and Andrew was unused to travelling, having never before adventured twenty miles beyond his native place. No wonder that he was sorely jaded in body and mind, when he put up for the night at a small town about thirty miles from C——, through which he ascertained, however, that the caravan, with its escort, had passed early in the morning of the preceding day—that the troop, while stopping to bait, had talked of Carlisle as their next place of exhibition; and had, in fact, struck into the great north road when they proceeded on their way. Andrew could gain no intelligence whether a boy, such as he described, accompanied the party. It having been very early morning when they baited their horses at ——, the females of the band and children (if there were any) were still asleep within the closed caravan.

So Andrew proceeded with a heavy heart, but a spirit of determined perseverance—and his pursuit (now that he was fairly on the track of its object) was comparatively easy.

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About mid-day, in mercy to his beast, as well as to recruit his own strength, he halted at a hedge alehouse, when, having unsaddled Greybeard and seen that he was taken care of, he entered the kitchen and called for refreshment. There were many persons drinking and talking in the place, and Andrew failed not to make his customary enquiries, which awakened an immediate clamour of tongues—every one being ready with some information relating to the troop Andrew was in pursuit of. Such was the confusion of voices, however, that he was kept for a moment in painful suspense, when a decent-looking woman, (apparently a traveller,) who was taking her quiet meal in one corner of the kitchen, came hastily forward, and laying her hand on Andrew's arm, and looking earnestly in his face, exclaimed—"After what are ye asking, master? Is it for a stray lamb ye're seeking—and hav'n't I seen your face before?"—Andrew shook like a leaf. The man of stern temper and iron nerves shook like an aspen-leaf, while the woman looked, and spake thus earnestly:—"Have ye—have ye found him?—have ye found my boy?" was all he could stammer out. "You are a stranger to me; but God bless you, if you can give me back my boy!"

"I am *not* a stranger to you, Andrew Cleaves; and I *can* give you back your boy; and the Lord bless him for your sake, for you saved me and mine, and took us in and gave us meat and drink when we were ready to perish. Come your ways with me, Andrew Cleaves—but, soft and quiet—for the laddie's in a precious sleep. He *has* come to hurt, but the Merciful watched over him."

So she led him softly and silently through a little back kitchen, and up a steep dark stair, into a small upper chamber, before the casement of which a checked apron was pinned up, to exclude the full glow of light from the uncurtained bed. Softly and silently, with finger on lip, she drew him on to the side of that humble bed, and there, indeed, fast locked in sleep, in sweet untroubled sleep, lay the little thoughtless one, whose disappearance had inflicted such cruel anxiety and distress.

The boy was sleeping sweetly, but his cheeks and lips

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were almost colourless; a thin linen bandage was bound round his head; and over one temple a soft, silky curl, that had escaped from the fillet, was dyed and stuck together with clotted blood. Andrew shuddered at the sight; but the woman repeated her whispered assurance, that there was no serious injury. Then the father kneeled softly down beside his recovered darling, his head bent low over the little tremulous hand that lay upon the patchwork-counterpane. Almost involuntarily his lips approached it; but refrained himself by a strong effort, and throwing back his head, lifted his eyes to Heaven in an ecstasy of silent gratitude; and, one after another, large tears rolled down over the rough, hard-featured face, every muscle of which quivered with powerful emotion. Yes, for the first time in his life, Andrew Cleaves poured out his whole heart in gratitude to his Creator in the presence of a fellow-creature; and when he arose from his knees, so far was he from shrinking abased and humiliated from the eyes that were upon him, that, turning to the woman, and strongly grasping her hands in his own, he said, softly and solemnly—"Now I see of a truth that a man may cast his bread upon the waters, and find it again after many days. I gave thee and thine orphan babe a little food and a night's shelter, and thou restorest to me my child. While Andrew Cleaves has a morsel of bread, thou shalt share it with him." And he was as good as his word; and from that hour, whatever were in other respects his still inveterate habits of thrift and parsimony, Andrew Cleaves was never known to "turn away his face from any poor man."

By degrees all particulars relating to Joey's disappearance and his providential recovery, were circumstantially unravelled. The little varlet had been accidentally separated from his schoolfellow, and while gaping about the fair in search of him, had straggled towards the large show-booth, where feats of rope-dancing and horsemanship were exhibited. Long he stood absorbed in wondering admiration of the merry-andrew's antic gestures, and the spangled draperies and nodding plumes of the beautiful lady who condescended to twirl the tambourine, and foot it aloft,

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"with nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles," for the recreation of the gaping multitude. Others of the troop came in and out on the airy stage, inviting the "ladies and gentlemen" below, to walk in, with such bland and cordial hospitality, that Joey thought it quite irresistible, and was just stepping under the canvass when a strong arm arrested him, and a splendid gentleman, in scarlet and gold, demanded the price of entrance. That was not at Joey's command, for all his copper hoard was already expended; so he was shrinking back, abashed and mortified, when one or two idlers of the band, probably seeing something promising about him, and that he was a pretty, sprightly, well-limbed lad, whose appearance might do credit to their honourable profession, entered into a parley with him, and soon made out that he was playing truant at that very moment, and apparently blessed with such an adventurous genius, as, with a little encouragement, might induce him to join the company, and succeed to the functions of a sharp, limber urchin, of whom inexorable death had lately deprived them. So Joey was let in gratis; and there he was soon translated into the seventh heaven of wonder and delight at the superhuman performances of his new acquaintances. He had, as it were, an innate passion for horses, and the equestrian feats threw him into fits of ecstacy. Then all the gentlemen and ladies were so good-natured and so funny! and one gave him a penny-pie, and another a drop of something strong and good; and then the manager himself—a very grand personage—told him, if he liked, he should wear a blue and silver jacket, and ride that beautiful pie-bald, with his tail tied up with flame-coloured ribands. *That* clinched the bargain; and in a perfect bewilderment of emulation and ambition—wonder and gratitude—gin and flattery—poor Joey suffered himself to be enrolled in "The Royal Equestrian Troop of Signor Angelo Galopo, di Canterini."

Forthwith was he equipped in the azure vestments of the deceased Bobby, and indulged with five minutes sitting on the back of the beautiful piebald; after which, on the close of the day's performance, he made one of the jovial and unceremonious party round a plentiful board, where he played his

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part with such right good will, and was so liberally helped to certain cordial potations, that long before the end of the banquet, his head dropped on the shoulder of his fair neighbour, the lovely Columbine, and in a moment he was fast locked in such profound slumber, that he stirred not hand or foot, till so late the next morning, that the caravan (in a snug berth, whereof he had been securely deposited,) had long passed the small town where Andrew had halted on his first day's chase.

Joey's awakening sensations were nearly as astonishing as those of Abon Hassan, when he unclosed his eyes in his own mean mansion, after his waking vision of exaltation to the throne of the Caliph. Poor Joey, who had fallen asleep in the intoxication of supreme enjoyment and gratified vanity, among knights and ladies glittering with gold and spangles, himself radiant in all the glories of the blue and silver, and the fancied master of the prancing piebald—found himself, on awakening, stowed away in a corner of the dark, suffocating, jolting caravan, of course divested of his finery, huddled up on a bag of straw, and covered with a filthy horse-rug. The whole ambulating dormitory was heaped with similar bedding, from which peeped out heads and arms and dirty faces, which Josiah was some time in assigning to the blooming heroines of the preceding evening. At last, however, he satisfied himself of the identity of the lovely Columbine; as she lay within reach, and had taken him under her especial protection, he made bold to pluck her rather unceremoniously by the outstretched arm, which salutation had the desired effect of rousing the fair one from her innocent slumbers, but only long enough to obtain, for Joey, a sound box of the ear, and a drowsily muttered command to "lie still, for a little troublesome rascal." So there he lay, half frightened, and half repentant, and quite disgusted with his close and unsavoury prison, from whence his thoughts wandered away to the pleasant cottage on the thymy common—his clean, sweet little chamber, where honeysuckle looked in at the window—his breakfast of new milk and sweet brown bread—his own lit-

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tle garden and his bee-hives—and Greybeard, that paragon of earthborn steeds.

But then came in review, the rival glories of the piebald, and Joey's remorseful feelings became less troublesome, and he longed ardently for the hour of emancipation. It came at last: a brief and unceremonious toilet was despatched by the female group; and great was Joey's indignation, when in lieu of the silver and azure, or his own good raiment, he was compelled to dress himself in the every-day suit of his deceased predecessor—a most villanous compound of greasy tatters, which, had he dared, he would have spurned from him with contemptuous loathing; but a very short experience, and the convincing language of a few hearty cuffs, accompanied with no tender expletives, had satisfied him of the danger of rebellion, and he was fain to gulp down his rising choler, and the scraps of last night's meal, which were chucked over to him as his portion of the slovenly breakfast.

In the mean time, the door and little square window of the caravan had been thrown open, and at last the machine came to a full stop on the high-road, by a hedge side, and the ladder was hooked to the high doorway, and the manager, who, with his spouse, had occupied a back compartment of the van, descended to review his cavalry, while the equestrians snatched a hasty meal dispensed to them by their associated Hebes.

There was the piebald shining in the morning sun, in all the perfection of piebald beauty—pawing and sidling, and curving inward his graceful neck, and small elegant head, as if impatient of the rein by which he was led at the side of a large Flemish-looking mare. At sight of his appointed palfrey, Joey was about to scramble down the ladder after Signor Angelo, when the latter most uncourteously repelled him, with such a push as sent him sprawling backwards on the floor of the caravan, and more than revived his late incipient feelings of disgust and repentance. But now the whole party, females and all, held parley of no very amicable nature about the door of their migratory council chamber. The success of the late performance at C—— had

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by no means been such as to sweeten the manager's temper, or to harmonize the "many minds" he had to deal with; and loud, and surly, and taunting accusations and recriminations were bandied about, the most acrimonious of which, Joey soon gathered, related to himself, and to some dispute respecting him, which had occurred the preceding night, after they had deposited him in his luxurious resting-place. It appeared that some of the party had even then begun to think with apprehension of the danger to which they exposed themselves by the abduction of a boy, whose father had ample means to pursue and punish them, should he discover that his son had left C—— in their company. These prudent suggestions were made light of by others of the troop: words had run high even then, and insides and outsides had arranged themselves for the night in no very placable moods. During the many silent hours of darkness they had jogged and jolted in company; almost every one however, in his secret mind, came over to the side of the doubters; and when at last they halted and called council, each accused the other of having caused the present dilemma. From words they proceeded to rough arguments, and at length to something very near a general battle, in which their fair companions, descending from "their high estate," took part so heartily, that Joey, finding himself quite unobserved, seized the opportunity to scramble down after them; but in his haste to reach *terra firma* he missed his footing, and fell headlong among the horses, already fretted and fidgety at the disorder of their riders, so that Joey's sudden precipitation set them rearing and pawing furiously, and he—the luckless truant?—received such a kick on the head, from the hard hoof of the ungrateful piebald, as not only completely stunned him, but left him such a ghastly and bloody spectacle, as stilled in a moment the uproar of the conflicting parties, and made them unanimous in their apprehensions of the serious consequences in which they might all be involved, should the accident prove fatal, of which there was every appearance. The child had ceased to breathe—not the faintest pulsation was perceptible. The panic became general, and the deci-

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sion immediate, to consider their own safety, by moving on as fast as possible, leaving the unhappy boy (who was pronounced quite dead) on the grass bank by the road side.

In two minutes the troop was in motion—in ten more, quite out of sight—and there lay poor Joey to all appearance a corpse, and soon to have become one in reality, but for the providential intervention of that poor woman by whom Andrew Cleaves was conducted to the bedside of his recovered child. That woman (as she briefly explained to Andrew on their stealthy progress towards the little chamber) was, indeed, the poor soldier's widow, who, with her orphan babe, had owed to his compassion, in her utmost need, the seasonable mercy of a night's lodging and a wholesome meal; and she had never forgotten the name of her benefactor, nor thought of him without a grateful prayer. She had travelled far on to her dead husband's birth-place in the Scotch Highlands, to claim, for his orphan and herself, the protection and assistance of his kindred. Her claims had not been disallowed, and among them she had dwelt contentedly till her child died. *Then* she began to feel herself a stranger among strangers, and her heart yearned towards her own country and kinsfolk; and she wrote a letter home to her own place, Manchester, the answer to which told her, that her friends, who were too poor to help her when she was left a widow, were now bettered in circumstances, and would give her a home and welcome; and that, now she had no living hindrance, she might obtain a comfortable subsistence by resuming her early labours at the loom. So she set out for her native place, a leisurely foot traveller, for she was no longer unprovided with means to secure a decent resting place and a wholesome meal; and she it was, who, having so far proceeded on her way, had discovered the young runaway lying by the way-side in the condition before described. Her feelings (the feelings of a childless mother!) needed no incentive to place her in a moment beside the forlorn deserted child, whose head she tenderly lifted on her bosom, and parting off the thickly-clotted hair, bound her own handkerchief about his bleeding temples. There was water within reach, with which

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she laved his face and hands, and had soon the joy of perceiving a tremulous motion of the lips and eyelids—and at last the boy breathed audibly, and his large black eyes unclosed, and he uttered a few words of wonder and distress, among which—"Oh, father! father!" were most intelligible; and to the woman's gentle inquiry of "who was his father? and did he live far off?" he answered faintly, that he was the son of Andrew Cleaves who lived at Redburn.

A second fit of insensibility succeeded those few words, but they were sufficient for the widow. Providence had sent her to save (she trusted) the child of her benefactor, and all her homely but well directed energies were called into action. Partly carrying him in her own arms, and partly by casual assistance, she succeeded in conveying him to the nearest dwelling, that small way-side inn. There he was put comfortably to bed, and medical aid obtained promptly—the longer delay of which must have proved fatal. And then a message was sent off to Farmer Cleaves, (a man and horse, for that poor woman was a creature of noble spirit, and impatient to relieve the father's misery,) and then the widow quietly took her station by the pillow of the little sufferer. His head had undergone a second dressing, and the surgeon had pronounced, that all would go well with him, if he were kept for a time in perfect quiet. It need not be told how rigidly that injunction was attended to, nor how carefully, when he was in a state to be removed, the father conveyed back his truant child to the shelter of his own peaceful cottage—nor how anxiously he was nursed up there to decided convalescence—nor how solemnly, yet tenderly, when the boy was so far recovered, his father set before him the magnitude of his offence, and the fatal consequences which had so nearly resulted from it. Joey wept sore, and looked down with becoming humility, and promised, over and over again, and really with a sincere intention, never, never again to give his father cause for uneasiness or displeasure.

Time travelled on—schooldays and holidays revolved in regular succession—and Joey comported himself just well

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enough to gain the character of a very good scholar in school, and a very idle dog out of it, except at home and in his father's sight, when he comported himself with such a show of sanctity and correctness, as was quite edifying to behold, and too easily lulled to rest the awakened caution of the still credulous old man.

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CHAPTER XVI.

ANDREW had continued his son at the academy to an unusually advanced period of youth, from the difficulty of knowing how to dispose of and employ him profitably, during the interregnum between school and the earliest time of admission into the counting-house, where, at the proper age, he was to be articled. At last, however, in consideration of his really forward and excellent abilities, the gentlemen of the firm consented to receive him; and now the time arrived when the human bark was to be launched from its supporting cradle into the tumultuous stream of active life. Insomuch as it advanced him, in his own estimation, to the honour and dignity of confirmed manhood, Josiah was elated at the change; but had he been left to follow the lead of his own inclinations, to a surety *they* would not have hoisted him up with a pen behind his ear, before a dingy desk in a dark gloomy counting-house, there to pore away the precious hours he could have disposed of so much more agreeably. Had Joey been allowed to choose his own lot in life, to a certainty he would have enrolled himself a bold dragoon, a dashing lancer, a trooper of some denomination—any thing that would have clothed him in a showy uniform, and given him the command of a horse; but all military professions were so abhorrent to Andrew Cleaves, that he would as lieve placed his son in the Devil's Own, as in "The King's Own;" and the boy was too well aware of his father's inveterate prejudices, even to hint at his own longings; still less did he hazard the more debasing avowal, that he would have preferred the situation of a dashing groom to a station at the desk; and that to be a jockey, a *real knowing* Newmarket jockey! (he had heard a vast deal about Newmarket,) would have been the climax of his ambition. Happy disposition, to qualify him for the

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staid clerk of a commercial establishment! But knowing the decree was irreversible, he submitted to it with a tolerably good grace, consoling himself with the reflection, that many young men so situated were nevertheless very fine fellows, and contrived, at odd hours, evenings, and holidays, to indemnify themselves very tolerably for their hours of durance vile. He had great confidence, moreover, that good fortune would introduce him to some of those choice spirits whose experience would initiate him into many useful secrets.

Joey's expectations were but too well founded: temptation lies in wait for youth at every turning and by-path; but when youth starts with the design of voluntarily entering her fatal snare, the toils are wound about the prey with treble strength, and rarely, if ever, is it disentangled. Joey was soon the associate and hero of all the idle and dissolute youth in C——; the hero of cock-fights, of bull-baitings, of the ring, of the skittle-ground, and every low, cruel, and debasing sport that prepares the way, by sure and rapid advances, through all the gradations of guilt, towards the jail, the convict-ship, and the scaffold.

Nevertheless, for a considerable time, Josiah contrived to keep up a very fair character with his employers—so clear and prompt was his despatch of business—and (with very few exceptions) so punctual and assiduous his attention to office hours. Beyond those seasons, their watchfulness extended not, and no glaring misdemeanour, on the part of their young clerk, had yet awakened any degree of suspicious vigilance.

The heart of Andrew Cleaves was, therefore, gladdened by such reports of his son's *official* conduct, as, coming from so respectable a quarter, were in his estimation sufficient surety of general good conduct, and he was consequently lulled into a fatal security, not even invaded by any of those vague and flying rumours which generally lead the way to painful but important discoveries. Andrew Cleaves had no friends—it could scarcely be said, any acquaintance—alas! it is to be feared, no wellwishers. Beyond the cold concerns of business, he had maintained

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no intercourse with his fellow-men. His world was a contracted span; two objects of interest occupied it wholly—his wealth and his son. But there was no equipoise between the scales that held those treasures. He would not, in Shylock's place, have been in suspense between "his ducats and his daughter."

Gold *had been* his idol, till superseded by that living claimant, to whose imagined good all other considerations became secondary and subservient, and for whom (looking to worldly aggrandizement as the grand point of attainment, though Andrew talked well of "the one thing needful") he continued to improve upon his habits of parsimony and accumulation, so as to deny himself the common comforts becoming necessary to his advancing years. But the hard gripe occasionally relaxed at the persuasive voice of Josiah's eloquence; and that hopeful youth, as he advanced in the ways of iniquity, made especial progress in its refined arts of specious hypocrisy, to which, alas! his early training had too favourably disposed him.

It would be a tedious and distasteful task minutely to trace the progressive steps by which Josiah attained that degree of hardened profligacy which marked his character by the time he had completed his nineteenth year—the second of his clerkship in Messrs.——'s counting-house. The marvel is that his seat on the high office-stool had not been vacated long before the expiration of that period. The eyes of his employers had for some time been open to his disreputable and ruinous courses. Their keen observation was of course upon him in all matters that could in any way affect their own interests; and at length, on that account, as well as from more conscientious motives, which ought to have had earlier influence, they deemed it requisite to arouse the fears of the still-deluded parent, and to recommend his interference to avert, if possible, the dangerous career of his infatuated son. Alas! it was a cruel caution, for it came too late. Too late, except to excite the father's fears to a sudden pitch of agony, which provoked him to bitter upbraidings and violent denunciations, and thus contributed to sear the already corrupted heart of

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the insensate youth, and to accelerate his desperate plunge into irretrievable ruin.

It was well known at C—— that Andrew Cleaves had (for a man in his station) amassed considerable wealth, and that his idolized and only son would inherit it undivided; and in that confidence there were not wanting venturous and unprincipled persons, who not only gave him credit in the way of trade, to an unwarrantable amount, but even advanced him loans from time to time, on the speculation of future repayment with usurious interest. By such means, added to the not inconsiderable gratifications he at different times obtained from his father, under various specious pretences, Josiah had been enabled to run a course of low and profligate extravagance, far exceeding any thing which had entered into the suspicions of his employers, or the tardily aroused apprehensions of the distressed father. Among the threats of that abused parent, there was one which Josiah doubted not would be promptly executed—a public advertisement in C——, that Andrew Cleaves held himself nowise answerable for any debts his son might think proper to contract—an exposure which would not only cut him off from all future supplies, but probably create such distrust of his hitherto undoubted heirship, as to bring forward all the claims standing against him, and irritate his father beyond hope of accommodation.

But the idea of absconding from C—— had long been familiar to Josiah, and he had for some time past been connected with a set of characters, whose daring exploits, and communication with the metropolis, had fired his ambition to emulate the former, and to transfer his genius to a theatre more worthy its enterprising capabilities. *Yet* Josiah's heart was not *quite hardened*. It had not lost *all pleasant* remembrance of his days of boyish happiness—of the indulgences of his father's dwelling, and of the repressed, but ill-dissembled fondness of that doting parent, whose proud and severe nature had even accommodated itself to offices of womanly tenderness, for the feeble infant left motherless to his care.

There were still moments—even in the circle of his vile

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associates—even in the concerting their infamous schemes —or while the profane oath still volleyed from his tongue, and the roar of riotous mirth and licentious song resounded —there were moments, even then, when recollection of better things flashed across his mind like angel's wings athwart the pit of darkness, and he shuddered with transient horror at the appalling contrast.

The faint gleam of such a mental vision still haunted him at the breaking up of a riotous meeting, during which he had finally arranged with his confederates the plan which was to remove him (probably for ever!) from C—— and its vicinity. "But I will have one more look at the old place before I go," suddenly resolved Josiah, when he had parted from his companions. "At least I will have a last look at the *outside* of the walls—though I *can't* go in—I *can't* face the old man before I leave him; he would not pass over what can't be undone—and there's no going back *now*—but I *will* see the old place again."

It was late on the Sabbath evening when Josiah formed this sudden resolution; and so quickly was it carried into effect, that it wanted near an hour to midnight when he reached the low boundary of the cottage garden.

It was a calm delicious night of ripening spring—so hushed and still, you might have heard the falling showers of overblown apple blossoms. Josiah lingered for a moment with his hand on the garden wicket; and while he thus tarried, was startled by a sudden but familiar sound from the adjacent close. It was the winnying salutation of his old friend Greybeard, who having perceived with fine instinct the approach of his young master and quondam playmate, came forward, as in days of yore, to the holly hedge which divided his pasture from the garden, and poking his white nose through the old gap betwixt the hawthorn and the gate, greeted him with that familiar winny.

"Ah, old boy! is it thou?" said the youth, in a low hurried voice, as he stopped a moment to stroke the face of his faithful favourite—"Dost *thou* bid me welcome home, old fellow?—Well, that's something!" and a short unnatu-

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ral laugh finished the sentence, as he turned from the loving creature, and with quick, but noiseless steps, passed up the garden walk to the front of the quiet cottage.

Quiet as the grave it stood in the flood of moonlight; its lonely tenant had long since gone to rest, and no beam from hearth or taper streamed through the diamond panes of the small casements.

The prodigal gazed for a moment on the white walls—on the honeysuckle already flowering round his own casement—then stepped within the porch, and softly and fearfully, as it were, raised his hand to the latch—which, however, he lifted not—only softly laid his hand upon it, and so, with eyes rooted to the ground, stood motionless for a few minutes, till the upraised arm dropped heavily; and with something very like a sigh, he turned from the door of his father's dwelling to retrace his steps towards C——.

Yet once again in his way down the garden path he turned to look on the home he was forsaking. At that moment the evil spirit slept within him, and his better nature was stirring in his heart. The repose of night—its "beauty of holiness"—the healing influence of the pure fresh air—the sight of that familiar scene—nay, the fond greeting of his dumb favourite—the thought for what purpose he was there—and of the old man who slept within those silent walls, unconscious of the shock impending over him in the desertion of his only child—all these things crowded together with softening influence into the heart of that unhappy boy, as he turned a farewell look upon the quiet cottage;—and just then a sound from within smote his ear faintly—at first a faint low sound, which deepened by degrees into a more audible murmur, and proceeded surely from his father's chamber. Josiah started. "Was the old man ill?" he questioned with himself.—"Ill, and alone!"—and without further parley he stepped quickly but noiselessly to the low casement, and still cautiously avoiding the possibility of being seen from within, gazed earnestly between the vine-leaves through the closed latice. The interior of the small chamber was quite visible in the pale moonshine—so distinctly visible that Josiah could even distinguish his father's large

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silver watch hanging at the bed's head in its nightly place —and on that bed two pillows were yet laid side by side, (it was the old man's eccentric humour,) as in the days when his innocent child shared with him that now solitary couch. But neither pillow had been pressed that night— the bed was still unoccupied: and beside it knelt Andrew Cleaves, visibly in an agony of prayer—for his unpraised hands were clasped above the now bald and furrowed brow. His head was flung far back in the fervour of supplication —and though the eyelids were closed, the lips yet quivered with those murmuring accents, which, in the deep stillness of midnight, had reached Josiah's ear, and drawn him to the spot. It was a sight to strike daggers to the heart of the ungrateful child, who knew too well, who felt too assuredly, that for him, offending as he was, that agonizing prayer was breathed—that his undutiful conduct and sinful courses had inflicted that bitterness of anguish depicted on the venerable features of his only parent. Self-convicted, self-condemned, the youthful culprit stood gazing as if spell-bound, and impulsively, instinctively, *his* hands also closed in the long-neglected clasp of prayer—and unconsciously *his* eyes glanced upward for a second, and *perhaps* the inarticulate aspiration which trembled on his lip was, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Yet such it hardly could have been—for that touching cry, proceeding from a deeply-stricken heart, would have reached the ear of Mercy; and, alas! those agitated feelings of remorse, which might, "if Heaven had willed it,"

"Have matured to penitence and peace,"

were but the faint stirrings of a better spirit doomed to be irrevocably quenched ere thoroughly awakened.

The tempter was at hand, and the infatuated victim wanted moral courage to extricate himself by a bold effort, while there was yet time, from the snare prepared for his destruction. Just at that awful moment, the crisis of his fate, when the sense of guilt suddenly smote upon his heart, and his better angel whispered—"Turn—yet turn and

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live!"—at that decisive moment a rustling in the holly hedge, accompanied by a low whistle and a suppressed laugh, broke on his startled ear; and, as if a serpent had stung him, he sprang, without one backward glance, from the low casement and the cottage walls; and almost at a bound he cleared the garden path and dashed through the little gate, which swung back from his desperate hand with jarring violence.

Those awaited him without from whom he could not brook the sneer of ridicule—with whom he had mocked at and abjured all good and holy things, and with whose desperate fortunes he had voluntarily embarked his own; and well they knew the hold they had upon him, and having at that time especial motives to desire his faithful adherence, they had dodged his steps to the lone cottage, under a vague suspicion, that if an interview should take place between the father and son, Nature might powerfully assert her rights, and yet detach the youth from their unholy coalition.

"The children of this world *are*, in their generation, wiser than the children of light." They guessed well, and too well succeeded in securing their victim; and before Josiah had half retraced the townward way, with his profligate companions, his mind was again engrossed by their nefarious projects, and all that had so recently affected him—the whole familiar scene—the low white cottage—the little chamber, and the aged man who knelt beside that lonely bed in prayer for an offending child—all these things had faded like a vision from his unstable mind; and, secretly humiliated at the recollection of his momentary weakness, the miserable youth bade an eternal adieu to the paths of peace and innocence, and gave himself up to work evil unreservedly.

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CHAPTER XVII.

The flood-gates of accusation and information once set open, innumerable tongues that had never stirred to give timely warning to a person so inaccessible and unpopular as was Andrew Cleaves, were voluble in pouring in upon him charge upon charge against the son who had been so lately not less the darling than the pride of the old man's heart. And many a one with whom he had weekly dealings, who had refrained from speaking *the word in time* which might have saved a fellow-creature from destruction, because their *own* pride was offended by the reserve of the austere old man, now sought him even in his lonely dwelling, to multiply upon him humiliating proofs of his misfortune, and professions of sympathy and compassion that would have been gall and wormwood to his proud spirit, if the overwhelming conviction of his son's deceptive and profligate conduct had not already humbled it to the dust. He heard all patiently and in silence, attempted no vindication of himself, when the comforters obliquely reflected on his blind credulity, by observing that they "had long seen how matters were going on," that they "had suspected such and such things from the first," that they "had always looked sharp after their own boys, thank God, but then they were ordinary children —no geniuses;" for it was well known how Andrew Cleaves had prided himself on his child's superior abilities: and the self-sufficient man, who had so long held himself pre-eminent in wisdom, qualified to rebuke and instruct others, now listened with a subdued spirit to the torrent of unasked and impertinent advice, which sounded sweet and pleasant to the ears of the intrusive utterers, if it fell harshly and unprofitably on those of the unhappy hearer.

On the Sabbath morning immediately succeeding that Saturday, in the course of which Andrew Cleaves had been

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subjected to this spiritual martyrdom, he went twice as usual to his parish church; but during divine service his eyes were never lifted, even during sermon time, so much as to the face of the minister, and his deep sonorous voice mingled not that day with those of the village choristers; and, in going and returning, he shunned all passing salutation, and, once within his own threshold, the cottage door was closed on all intruders, (for, presuming on his present circumstances, such were not wanting to present themselves,) and no human eye again beheld him, till that of his undutiful child, drawn to his chamber window at the still midnight hour, looked upon the distress he had occasioned. Not in vain had been the long and uninterrupted communing of Andrew Cleaves with his own heart and with his God. Sweet to him were the uses of adversity, for they had not to struggle with a heart of unbelief, neither with one seared by vicious courses, nor debased by sensual indulgence. The spiritual foundation was sound, though human pride, inducing moral blindness, had raised on it a dangerous superstructure. But when the hour came, and the axe (in mercy) was struck to the root of the evil, and the haughty spirit bowed down in self-abasement, then was the film withdrawn from his mental vision, and Andrew Cleaves *really* looked into himself, and detected his besetting sins in all their naked deformity. Yes—at last he detected his pride, his worldliness, his worship of the creature, encroaching on that due to the Creator. He felt and confessed his own utter insufficiency, and laying down at the foot of the cross the burden of his frailties and sorrows, he sought counsel and consolation at the only source, which is never resorted to in vain. As he proceeded in the work of self-examination and self-arraignment, his heart relented towards his offending child. Had he yielded *something* of his own inflexible determination to the boy's known disinclination for the line of life marked out for him, the parental concession might have established in reality that gratefully filial confidence, the semblance of which had been so artfully assumed; and the father's heart was wrung with its bitterest pang, when he called to mind the sanctified hypocrisy which had so long imposed upon

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him, and reflected that his own mistaken system and erroneous measures, his own boasted example of superior sanctity, might have been the means of ingrafting it on his son's character. The fruit of that night's vigil was a determination on the part of Andrew, to depart the next morning for C——, and seek out his erring child—not with frowns and upbraidings, but the more effective arguments of tender remonstrance and mild conciliation; to inquire into and cancel whatever pecuniary embarrassments he had incurred; and, having done so, to say, "My son, give me thine heart!" and then—for who could doubt the effect of such an appeal?—to consult the lad's own wishes with regard to a profession, as far as might be compatible with maturer reason and parental duty. So resolved, and so projected Andrew Cleaves during the sleepless watches of that Sabbath night; but when morning came he found himself unable to act on his determination so immediately as he had intended. The conflict of the spirit had bowed down the strong man. He arose feeble and indisposed, and altogether unequal to the task he had assigned himself. Therefore, as the delay of four-and-twenty hours could not be material, he determined to pass that interval in deliberately reconsidering his new projects, and in acquiring the composure of mind which would be so requisite in the approaching interview with Josiah. Early on the morrow, however, with recruited strength, and matured purpose, he hastily despatched the morning's meal, and was preparing to depart for C——, when the sound of approaching footsteps, and the swinging to of the garden gate, made him pause for a moment with his hand on the latch; and almost before he could lift it, the door was dashed rudely open, and three men presented themselves, one of whom stationed himself just without the threshold, while the two others stepping forward, threw down a warrant on the table, abruptly declaring that, by its authority, they were empowered to make search for, and arrest, the body of Josiah Cleaves. Their abrupt notice fell like a thunderclap on the ear of the unfortunate old man; and yet, for a moment, he comprehended not its full and fatal sense, but stood as if spell-bound, upright, immovable, every muscle of his strong

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features stiff as in the rigidity of death, and his eyes fixed with a stony and vacant stare on the countenance of the unfeeling speaker. And yet the man was but outwardly hardened by his hateful occupation. His heart was not insensible to the speechless horror of that harrowing gaze. His own eyes fell beneath it, and in softened tones of almost compassionate gentleness, he proceeded to explain, that in the execution of his duty, he must be permitted to make strict search over the cottage, and its adjacent premises, in some part of which it was naturally suspected the offender might have taken refuge, with the hope of remaining concealed till the first heat of pursuit was over. As he spoke, Andrew Cleaves gradually recovered from the first effects of that tremendous shock. His features relaxed from their unnatural rigidity, and by a mighty effort, subduing the convulsive tremor which succeeded for a moment, he regained almost his accustomed aspect of stern composure, and in a low, but steady voice, calmly demanded for what infraction of the laws his son had become amenable to justice. The appalling truth was soon communicated. In the course of the past night, the counting-house of Messrs. —— had been entered by means of skeleton keys; access to the cash-drawer, the strong box, and other depositories of valuables, had been obtained by similar instruments, and considerable property in notes, gold, and plate, abstracted by the burglars, who had escaped with their booty, and as yet no traces of their route had been discovered. Then came the dreadful climax, and the officer's voice was less firm as he spoke it, though every softened accent fell like an ice-bolt on the father's heart. His son—his only child—his own Josiah, had been the planner—the chief perpetrator of the deed. A chain of circumstances already elicited—evidence irrefragable—left no shadow of uncertainty as to his guilt, and the measure of it; and though he was known to have had accomplices, perhaps to have been the tool of more experienced villany, his situation of trust in Messrs. ———'s firm, and the advantage he had taken of it in the perpetration of the robbery, deservedly marked him out as the principal offender, after whom the myrmidons of justice were hottest in pursuit.

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The miserable parent listened in silence to the officer's brief and not aggravated communication. He heard all in silence, with a steady brow, and a compressed lip, but with looks rooted to the ground; and when all was told, bowing down his head, he waved his hand with dignified submission, and calmly articulating, "It is enough, do your duty," seated himself in his own elbow-chair, from whence he stirred not, and neither by word, look, or gesture, gave further token of concern in what was going forward, while the ineffectual search was proceeding. When it was over, and the officers, after a few well-meant but unheeded words of attempted comfort, left him alone with his misery, he was heard to arise and close the cottage door, making it fast within with bar and bolt; and from that hour, no mortal being beheld Andrew Cleaves, till, on the third day from that on which his great sorrow had fallen upon him, he was seen slowly walking up the High street of C——, with an aspect as composed as usual, though its characteristic sternness was softened to a milder seriousness, as if the correcting hand of God had affixed that changed expression, and his tall, athletic form, hitherto upright as the cedar, bent earthward with visible feebleness, as though, since he trode that pavement last, ten added years had bowed him nearer to the grave. His calamity was generally known, and as generally commiserated; for even those whose contracted hearts, and mean tempers, had taken unchristian delight in mortifying the Pharisaical and parental pride of a man so arrogant in his prosperity, now that the hand of the Lord lay heavily on him, were affected by the sacredness of a sorrow for which there was no balm in human sympathy, and were awed by the quiet dignity of his silent resignation. As he passed on, many a hat was touched with silent respect, whose wearer he was personally unacquainted with, and many hands were extended to his, by persons who had never in their lives before accosted him with that kindly greeting.

To those who addressed him with a few words of cordial but unavailing concern and sympathy, he replied without impatience, but with a brief and simple acknowledgement,

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or a lowly uttered—"God's will be done;" and withdrawing himself, as soon as possible, from the cruel kindness of his comforters, he betook himself, with all the undiminished energy of his uncommon character, to transact the business which had urged him forth into the haunts of men, in the first nakedness of his affliction. To satisfy the demands of tradespeople and other inhabitants of C——, who had claims on his unhappy son, was his first concern, as it had been his intention before the last stroke of ruin; and that done, he repaired to the banking-house of Messrs. ——; and having ascertained the actual loss those gentlemen had sustained by the late robbery—and setting aside even their own admission, that others had assisted in the perpetration, and partaken of the booty with his unhappy boy—he proceeded, with unwavering inflexibility of purpose, to make over to them, without reservation or condition, the entire sum of his long-accumulating wealth, of which their house had been the faithful depository; and the first faint sensation of relief which lightened the heart of the afflicted father, was that when he received into his hands, not an acquittance of his son's criminal abstraction, from which he well knew Messrs. —— could not legally absolve him, but an acknowledgement of such and such monies paid into the establishment, as due to it on account of his son Josiah. That payment reimbursed the firm within a trifle of their actual loss, and the deficiency was made good to them in a fortnight, by the sale of a few acres of Andrew's paternal farm—the little patrimony he had tilled and cultivated with the sweat of his brow, in the natural and honest hope of transmitting it entire and unalienable to his descendants, though destined, in his fond anticipation, to form but an inconsiderable portion of the worldly wealth to which he aspired for his young Josiah. The greater part of the land in the occupation of Andrew Cleaves, was held on renewable leases—a term whereof expiring about the time of his great calamity, he resigned the whole into his landlord's hands.

The concern, though considerable, had hitherto been but the healthful and salutary occupation of his hale and vigorous age, and its annual bringings in were still added to the

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previous hoard for him who was to inherit all. But that great stimulus was gone forever. For whom should he now toil?—for whom should he accumulate? For whom—to what, look forward? "To Heaven," was the fervent response of his own heart, when the desolate old man thus mused within himself, but with earth what more had he to do? "Sweet are the lessons of adversity." His elder sin—his abstract covetousness—was dead within him. The few paternal acres with which he had begun the world, would more than furnish a sufficiency for his contracted wants, and even afford a surplus to reserve for future exigencies; and in calculating those, he thought far less of his own desolate old age, than of the wretched exile, whose cry might come from afar to the ear of his forsaken parent, should disease and misery fall upon him, and the associates of his guilt leave him to perish in his helplessness. It was a miserable hope, but still it *was hope*, and it lent the old man energy and strength to ply his rural labours, in their now contracted space, with almost undiminished activity.

Weeks slipped away—weeks—months—a year—four years. Four years had come and gone since the day that left Andrew Cleaves a worse than childless father—the forlorn tenant of his paternal cottage, which, with its appendencies of barn, out-buildings, and a few fields, was all that *then* remained to him of his previous prosperity.

Four years had passed since then, and the old man still lived. The same roof still sheltered him, the same small garden still yielded its produce to his laborious hands. But that small dwelling, and that poor patch of ground, and its adjoining slip of pasturage, a crazy cart, one cow, and one old horse—the favourite grey colt, now white with age—these were all the possessions that Andrew Cleaves could now call his own in the wide world. A cry *had* come from afar—the appeal of guilt and misery—and it came not unheeded. Again and again the father's heart was wrung, and his straitened means were drained to the uttermost to supply the necessities, or alas! the fraudulent cravings of the miserable supplicant. And now and then professions of contrition, and promises of reform, served to keep up the pa-

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rent's hope; and, old and impoverished as he was, he would have taken up his staff and travelled uncounted leagues to have thrown himself upon the outcast's neck, and received into his own bosom the tears of the repentant prodigal. But under various pretences, the wretched youth still evaded all propositions of this nature, though his communications became more frequent—more apparently unreserved—more regular and plausible—and at last came such as, while he read them, blinded the old man's eyes with tears of gratitude and joy. It was an artfully constructed tale. The eloquence of an itinerant preacher had touched the stony heart. Then came the hour of conversion—of regeneration—of justification—of peace unspeakable! Pious friends had rejoiced over their converted brother—had associated him in their labours—deeming him a fit instrument to convince others, himself a shining testimony of the power of grace—and then points of worldly consideration were cautiously introduced. For him there was no safety in his native land; but other lands offered a refuge—a decent maintenance—above all, a spiritual harvest; and thither, by many unquestionable tokens, he felt himself called to labour in the vineyard. A little band of elect Christians were about to embark themselves and families for a distant mission. To them he was, as it were, constrained in spirit to join himself—and then came the pith and marrow of the whole—the point to which these hypocritical details had tended—to his kind parent, his forgiving father, he looked for the pecuniary assistance necessary to fit him out for a long voyage and distant establishment. And there were references given to "reverend gentlemen," and "serious Christians;" and letters confirming Josiah's statement were actually addressed to Andrew Cleaves by more than one pious enthusiast, blessed with more zeal than discretion, whose credulity had been imposed on by the pretended convert.

This well-concerted story was but too successful. All lurking doubts were discarded from Andrew's mind when he succeeded in ascertaining that the letters addressed to him were actually written by the persons whose names were affixed as signatures—names long familiar to him in

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the pages of the Evangelical Magazines, and Missionary Registers. "Now may I depart in peace," was the old man's inward ejaculation, as, full of joyful gratitude, he despoiled himself of nearly his last earthly possessions to forward what he believed the brightening prospects of his repentant child. The reversion of his cottage and garden and the small close, was promptly, and without one selfish pang, disposed of to a fair bidder, and an order for the sum it sold for as quickly transmitted to the unworthy expectant, together with a multifarious assortment of such articles as the deceived parent, in his simplicity of heart, fondly imagined might contribute to the comfort and convenience of the departing exile. A few good books were slipped into the package, and Josiah's own Bible and Prayer-book were not fogotten. Involuntarily the old man paused as he was carefully enfolding the former in its green baize cover; involuntarily he paused a moment; and almost unconsciously opened the sacred volume, and on the few words written on the fly-leaf two-and-twenty years before by his own hand, his eyes dwelt intently till the sight became obscured, and a large drop falling on the simple inscription, startled the venerable writer from his fond abstraction.

Day after day, the now comforted but anxious father expected the coming letter of filial acknowledgement. Day after day, procrastinating the tasks on which depended his whole subsistence, he was at C—— by the hour of the mail's arrival, and evening after evening he returned to his solitary home—his frugal, alas! his now scanty meal, sick at heart with "hope deferred," yet devising plausible pretences for retaining the blissful illusion. But at length its fading hues were utterly effaced—no word—no letter—no communication came; silence,—chilling, withering, death-like silence,—held on its palsying course; and, once more divested of all earthly hope, Andrew Cleaves leant wholly for support on the staff which faileth not in direst extremity. But the fiery trial had not reached its climax. The gold was yet to be more thoroughly refined, yea, proved to the uttermost.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

ANDREW CLEAVES.

THREE months had elapsed since the last day of Andrew's short-lived gladness, when a rumour reached him which had been for some time current at C——, that his unhappy son had been seen in the neighbourhood, and recognized by more than one person, in spite of the real and artificial change which had taken place in his appearance; that he had been observed in company with suspected characters, some of whom were believed to be connected with a gang of horse-stealers, whose depredations had lately proceeded to an audacious extent in C—— and its vicinity; and that two houses had lately been broken open under circumstances that evidenced the skilful practice of experienced thieves. The painful warning came not to an incredulous ear. That of the unhappy father was but too well prepared for the worst that might betide. But this vague perception of impending calamity—this indefinite anticipation of something near and terrible—was, of all his painful experiences, the most difficult to endure with Christian equanimity.

For many days and nights after he heard that frightful rumour, Andrew Cleaves knew not an hour of peaceful thought, nor one of quiet slumber. However employed in his cottage—in his garden—if a passing cloud but cast a momentary shadow, he started from his task, and looked fearfully abroad for the feet of those who might be swift to bring evil tidings. And in the silence of night, and during the unrest of his thorny pillow, the stirring of a leaf—the creaking of the old vine stems—the rustling of the martin on her nest under the eaves—sounded to his distempered fancy like steps, and whispers, and murmuring voices. And once, when the night-hawk dashed against his casement in

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her eccentric circles, he started from his bed with the sudden thought (it came like lightning) "was it possible that *he*—the guilty one—the wretched—the forsaken—might have stolen near, under the shadow of night, to gaze like the first outcast Cain, on the tents of peace, from which he was forever exiled?"—"Oh! *not* from hence—not from his father's roof?" was the old man's unconscious murmur, as, under the influence of that agitating thought, he flung open the cottage door, and stepped out into the quiet garden. There was no sign nor sound of mortal intrusion—no foot-print on the dewy herb-bed beneath the casement, betraying its pressure by the exhalation of unwonted fragrance. The old horse was grazing quietly in his small pasture; the garden-gate close latched, and no objects visible on the common to which it opened, but the dark low pyramids of furze, distinct in the cloudless starlight. And soon that feverish fancy passed away from the old man's mind as the balmy air played round his throbbing temples, and he inhaled the wafting of that thymy common, and listened to the natural tones of midnight's diapason, and gazed fixedly on the dark-blue heaven, and its starry myriads—

> "For ever singing as they shine,
> 'The hand that made us is divine.'"

Ten days had dragged on heavily since Andrew Cleaves's mournful tranquillity had been thus utterly overthrown. During all that time he had not ventured beyond his own little territory. The weekly journey to C—— with his cart-load of rural merchandise, (the produce of his garden and his dairy,) had been relinquished, though its precarious sale now furnished his sole means of subsistence. But towards the end of the second week, finding himself unmolested by fresh rumours or corroborations, he began to take hope that the whispers of his son's re-appearance in the neighbourhood might have arisen on vague suspicion, or the slight ground of fancied or accidental resemblance. So reasoning with himself, the old man shook off, as far as in him lay, the influence of those paralysing apprehensions, and his morbid reluctance to re-enter the busy streets

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of C——, where he felt as if destined to encounter some fresh and overwhelming misfortune. But though Andrew Cleaves's iron nerves and powerful mind had been thus enfeebled by his late trial of torturing suspense, he was not one to encourage vague forebodings, or give way to pusillanimous weakness; so, girding up his loins for renewed exertions, he loaded his little cart with its accustomed freight, and, as cheerfully as might be, set off for C—— market. By the time he reached it, bodily exercise and mental exertion co-operating with change of scene and variety of objects, had in a great measure restored to him his usual firmness and self-possession, and he transacted his business clearly and prosperously—provided himself with such few articles of home-consumption as he had been accustomed weekly to take back from C——, and once more set his face homeward, inwardly blessing God that he was permitted to return in peace.

As he turned the corner of Market Street, into that where stood the court-house, in which the magistrates were holding their weekly meeting, his progress was impeded by an unusual crowd which thronged the doors of the building, with an appearance of uncommon excitation. Andrew was, however, slowly making way through the concourse, when two or three persons observed and recognized him—and suddenly a whisper ran through the crowd, and a strange hush succeeded, and all eyes were directed towards him, as the people pressed back, as though, in sympathetic concert, to leave free passage for his humble vehicle. But the old man, instead of profiting by their spontaneous courtesy, unconsciously tightened his reins and gazed about him with troubled and bewildered looks. In a moment he felt himself the object of general observation, and then his eyes wandered instinctively to the court-house doors, from whence confused sounds proceeded, and at that moment one or two persons from within spoke with the eager listeners on the steps; and the words—"prisoner"—and "committed," smote upon Andrew's ear, and the whole flashed upon him. As if struck by an electric shock, he started up, and, leaping upon the pavement with all the agility of youthful vi-

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gour, would have dashed into the justice hall, but for a firm and friendly grasp which forcibly withheld him. Wildly striking down the detaining hand, he was rushing forward, when himself and all those about the doors were suddenly forced back by a posse of constables and others descending the court-house steps, and clearing the way for those who were conducting the prisoner to jail. And now it was that the poor old man, overcome by agonizing expectation, leaned heavily and unconsciously on the friendly arm which a moment before he had dashed aside with impatient recklessness. Cold drops gathered upon his forehead—he breathed short and thick, and his sight became misty and imperfect, as he strained it with painful intensity towards the open doorway. But it cleared partially as the expected group came forth. Three persons only—the middlemost a handcuffed, guarded felon, whose downcast features, haggard, and dark, and fierce—and shadowed by a mass of coarse red hair, were seen but for a moment, as he was hurried short round the corner of the court-house to the adjacent prison. But the old man *had* seen them—he had seen enough; a genial glow diffused itself through his shivering frame—and with a burst of renovated energy he clasped his upraised hands forcibly together, and cried out with a piercing voice—"It is *not* he—Oh, God! it is not *he*." It *was* a piercing cry! The prisoner started, and half turned—but he was hurried off, and the crowd had already closed in between him and Andrew Cleaves, who, recovering a degree of self-possession, looked up at last to note and thank those who had befriended him in his agony. Every where—from all eyes—he encountered looks of compassionate interest and distressful meaning; and no one spoke but in some low whisper to his neighbour—and again Andrew's heart sunk with a strange fearful doubt. But had he *not* beheld with his own eyes?—That dark gaunt countenance!—Those fiery elf-locks!—"*That* could not be my curly-headed boy—You saw it was not he!" the old man uttered, as his eyes wandered with imploring anxiety from face to face, and resting at last on that of the friend whose arm still lent him its requisite support, read there such a page of fearful mean-

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ing, as scarce needed the confirmation of words to reveal the whole extent of his calamity. But the words were spoken—the few and fatal words which dispelled his transient security. They sounded on his ear like the stunning din of rushing waters, yet were they low and gentle; but his physical and mental powers were failing under the rapid transitions of conflicting passions, and overtasked nature obtained a merciful respite, by sinking for a time into a state of perfect unconsciousness.

It needs not to detail the particulars of that last daring exploit which had been the means of consigning Josiah into the hands of justice, nor of the progressive circumstances which had drawn him back, step by step, with the hardened confidence of infatuated guilt, to receive the punishment of his crimes on the very spot where he had first broken through the laws of God and man. Neither will we attempt to trace the journals of those miserable weeks that intervened between his committal to the county jail and his trial, which came on at the next assizes. Still less may we venture to paint minutely the first meeting of parent and child, in such a place, under such circumstances; —on one side, the overwhelming agony of grief and tenderness,—on the other, the callous exterior of sullen insensibility, and sneering recklessness, and unfilial reproaches, "sharper than a serpent's tooth." It is too painful to dwell on such a scene—too harrowing to depict it. Rather let us pass on to the brighter days of that awful interval which was most blessed in its prolongation. Light from above penetrated the depth of the dungeon. The prayer of faith prevailed. The sinner's heart was touched; and at last the tears of the repentant son fell like balm upon the father's bosom. From *that* hour the gracious work was gradually perfected. The good seed, though mixed with tares, had been sown already in Josiah's heart, and God gave time, in mercy, that the parental hand which had first sown it there, should, with gentle and dear-bought experience, revive the long-hidden and unfruitful germ, and cherish it into life everlasting. The father's labour of love had been ably seconded by the Christian zeal of the officiating chaplain,

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who was unremitting in his visits to the prisoner's cell, especially at those times when imperious necessity detained Andrew Cleaves at his own desolate home, or forced him more unwillingly into the public haunts. But when (as was not unfrequent) Mr. Grey found the father and the son together, it was very affecting to observe with what a chastised and humble spirit the aged man acknowledged his *own* deficiencies—his *own* need of instruction, and his own earnest desire to profit by the spiritual teaching, and pious exhortations, addressed to his unhappy son. Mr. Grey's voice not seldom faltered with emotion, as he looked on his two hearers, the eyes of both fixed on him with such earnest reverence!—of the beautiful youth!—and the old grey-haired man! and both so near the grave!

The awful hour approached of Josiah's arraignment before an earthly tribunal; but his trial did not come on till the last day of the assizes. Its result was inevitable, had the cause been defended by the ablest counsel in the land; but no defence was attempted—all had been pre-arranged between the father and son; and when the latter, in a low but steady voice, pleaded "guilty" to the charge against him, and, in spite of merciful dissuasion from the Bench itself, firmly persisted in that plea, and it was finally recorded, the aged parent who had accompanied him into court, and borne up through all the preliminary forms with unshaken fortitude, bowed his head in token of perfect acquiescence with that decisive act, and, yielding at last to natural weakness, suffered himself to be led away, as the judge arose to pronounce the sentence.

On the evening of the day preceding that appointed for his execution, far different was the scene in Josiah's cell, from what it presented in the earlier stages of his imprisonment. Its occupants were the same as then—the old afflicted man, and the poor guilty youth—and they were alone together, and *now* for the last time, and earthly hope was none for either of them. And yet in that gloomy cell—that portal of the grave *was* Hope, not born of *this* world, and Peace, such as the world "can neither give nor take away." In the father's heart a humble and holy con-

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fidence, that, through Christ's atonement and intercession, the pardon of his repentant child was already registered in heaven; and in the son's, a more chastised and trembling hope, built up on the same corner-stone, and meekly testified by a perfect submission to his awarded doom, far removed from the miserable triumph of false courage, and the presumptuous confidence of fanatic delusion.

That evening was the close of the last Sabbath Josiah was to pass on earth, and the old man had obtained the mournful privilege of being locked up for the night in the condemned cell. Father and son had that day partaken together of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and when the pious and compassionate chaplain who had administered that holy rite looked in upon them before the closing of the prison doors, they were sitting together upon the low hard pallet, side by side, hand clasped in hand; and few words passed between them, for they had spoken all. But the Bible lay open upon the father's knees, and the eyes of both followed the same line, on the same page, as the old man occasionally read, in his deep solemn voice, some strengthening and consolatory sentence. The youth's tall slight form was visibly attenuated, and his face was very pale—yet it had regained much of its sweet and youthful expression. The jetty curls, of which his father had been so proud, again clustered in glossy richness on his white and polished forehead, and as his head leaned against the old man's shoulder, a large tear, which had trembled on the long black fringes of his downcast eyelids, dropped on the sacred page, which assuredly it profaned not. As the good chaplain gazed upon that youthful countenance, his own eyes filled with tears, and he almost groaned within himself—"To be cut off so young!" But repressing that involuntary thought, as one of sinful questioning with Heaven, he addressed to each of his heart-stricken hearers a few fitting words of comfort and exhortation; and having kneeled down with them in short but fervent prayer, and promised to revisit them at the earliest hour of admission, he departed for the night with his Master's emphatic words—"Peace be with you!"

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The pale cold light of a November dawn yet feebly visited the cell, when Mr. Grey re-entered early on the fatal morning, and all was so still within, he thought *both* slept, the parent and the child. Both had lain down together on the narrow pallet, and the youth's eyes were heavy, and he "slept for sorrow;" but in age the whole weight falls *within*, and presses not upon the aching eyelids—so the old man slept not. The son's cheek was pillowed on the father's breast, every feature composed in angelic peace, and his slumbers were deep and tranquil as those of infant innocence. One long pale hand was clasped within his father's —in that hard withered hand which had toiled for him so long—and as the chaplain drew near, and stooped over the bed, the old man, who had been so intently watching his child's placid sleep as not to heed the opening of the cell, turned his head round with an impatient gesture, as if to prevent the disturbance of that blessed rest. Perhaps *he* also had slumbered for a while, and awaking with that young head upon his bosom, where it had so often lain in the beauty of childhood, his mind had wandered back confusedly to that blissful season and its fair vision of parental hope. But one glance round the walls of the small prison room at the person of the reverend visiter, recalled him to the scene of sad reality, and knowing that the hour was come, he cast upward one earnest look of unutterable supplication, and softly pressing his lips to the forehead of the still unconscious sleeper, thus tenderly awakened him as he had often done before to light and joy; but *now* to the light of a new day, which for him, whose hours were numbered, was to have no morrow but eternity. And from that hour, till the earthly expiation was complete, Andrew Cleaves left not for one single instant the side of his unhappy son; and having surely received strength from above, proportioned to his great necessity, not only sustained *himself* firmly throughout the tremendous trial, but soothed and supported the fainting spirit of the poor youth in his dishonoured passage through the valley of the shadow of death, whispering hope and consolation even within the portal of that gloomy gate, through which, according to the course of nature, him-

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self should have gone first. And when all was over, his aged hands helped to compose in its narrow receptacle that youthful form which should have followed his own remains to a peaceful grave, and laid his grey head reverently in the dust.

Andrew Cleaves had provided that his own cart, with the old favourite horse, should be in readiness at the place of execution, that Gallows-hill, at a short distance from C——, where his first outset with the young Josiah had been so ominously impeded. Compunctious bitterness might have sharpened the arrow in his heart, had the absorbing *present* left room for retrospection. But to him the past, the future, and all extraneous circumstances, were for a time annihilated. In comparatively light affliction, the heart takes strange delight in aggravating its own sufferings with bitter fancies, and dear remembrances, and dark anticipations; but a mighty grief sufficeth unto itself in its terrible individuality.

So absorbed, yet acting as if mechanically impelled while aught remained to do, the old man proceeded with his appointed task, and having, with the assistance of friendly hands, lifted into the cart the shell containing that poor *all* which now remained to him on earth, he quietly took his seat beside it, while those who had so far lent their charitable aid, prepared to accompany the humble vehicle with its mournful freight, and to lead the old horse—ah! how unconscious of his charge—with slow and respectful pace, to the desolate home of his aged master. Just as the simple arrangement was complete, the old man, whose eyes had not once wandered from the coffin, lifted them for a moment to the face of a woman, who had touched him accidentally, as she stood beside the cart. The sight of that face was like lightning from the past. It flashed through heart and brain, and wakened every nerve that thrilled to torturing memory; and almost he could have cried aloud—"Hast thou found me, oh, mine enemy?" but he refrained himself; and groaning inwardly, let fall his head upon his breast in deep humility. Then slowly lifting it, looked up again into that remembered face, still fixed on him with an

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expression of unforgetting hardness; and laying his hand upon the coffin, he said in a subdued tone, "Woman! pray for me—the time *is* come."

The old man looked up no more, neither spake nor moved, nor betrayed further signs of consciousness, till the humble car, with its charitable escort, stopt at the gate of his own cottage garden. Then rousing himself to fresh exertion, his first care was to assist in bearing the body of his dead son under the shelter of that roof, beneath which, three-and-twenty years before, he had welcomed him, a new-born babe, and to place the coffin (for he would have it so) on his own bed, in his own chamber. Then lingering for a moment behind those who had helped him to deposit the untimely burden, he drew the white curtain before the little casement, glanced round the chamber as if to ascertain that all was arranged with respectful neatness, and stepping softly, like one who feared to disturb the slumbers of the sick, paused on the threshold to look back for a moment, and making fast the door, as if to secure his treasure, followed his friends into the outer room, and with quiet and collected firmness, rendered to all his grateful acknowledgments for their charitable services, and set before them such refreshment as his poor means had enabled him to provide.

Neither, while they silently partook round his humble board, did he remit aught of kindly hospitality, nor was it apparently by any painful effort that he so exerted himself. But there was *that* in his countenance and deportment, and in the tone of his low deep voice, which arrested the words of those who would have pressed him to "eat and drink, and be comforted," and carried conviction to the hearts of all, that to *his* affliction *One* only could minister; and that having rendered him all the active service immediately needful, they should best consult his wishes by leaving him to the unmolested quiet of his solitary cottage. There was a whispering among themselves, as they stood up to depart,—and then a few lowly spoken, but earnest proffers were made, to return at the close of evening, and watch through the hours of darkness, (while the old grey head took rest in sleep,) by him whose slumbers needed no guardianship. But

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the kindly offer was declined with a gentle shake of the head, and a faint smile, which spoke more meaningly than words—and the old man spoke also, and thanked and blessed them, and bade them take no care for him, for he should "*now* take rest." So they retired—slowly and reluctantly retired—and left him to his coveted solitude.

But there were not wanting some who, deeply moved with compassionate anxiety for the desolate old man, came about the cottage after nightfall, and crept close to its walls with stealthy footsteps. And they told how, looking cautiously into the chamber of death, wherein a light was burning, they saw a sight which so strangely and powerfully affected them, that (rough peasants as they were) they could not afterwards speak of it with unfaltering voices. The coffin, from which the lid had been removed, rested, as they had helped to place it, at the old man's desire, on one half of his own bedstead; and beside it, he had since arranged his mattress and pillow, and then (his head pressing against the coffin, and one arm flung across over its side) he lay at length in sweet and tranquil slumber. He had told them he should "*now* take rest;" and, doubtless, that rest so taken, strange and awful as it was to look upon, was sweet and blessed, in comparison with all he had lately tasted. For him the bitterness of death was past; and the nearness of his own change made of slight account the little intervening space of earthly darkness. Once more his son lay beside him on that same bed they had so often shared together; and perhaps the moment of reunion with his forgiven child was already anticipated in the dreams of that placid sleep, which composed his venerable features in such unearthly peace.

Four days afterwards, the remains of Josiah Cleaves were quietly and decently interred beside those of his mother in Redburn churchyard. Six labourers, formerly in the employ of Andrew, volunteered to bear the body to its last resting-place; and two or three respectable persons, in decent mourning, walked behind the aged solitary mourner. And beside him none other was akin to the dead, of those who stood that day about that untimely grave in Redburn

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churchyard; yet was his the only face, which, as the affecting service proceeded, maintained unmoved composure, and his the only dry eyes that followed the descent of the coffin, as it was lowered into "the pit where all things are forgotten."

Andrew Cleaves had unavoidably incurred a few trifling debts during the time of Josiah's imprisonment, and the consequent relaxation of his own laborious industry. To discharge those, and the burial expenses, he parted with his cow, and with his last *freehold*,—that small old pew in the parish church, which had descended to him from his father, the heirloom of many generations, where he himself (a small urchin!) had stood aloft upon the seat between his father and his mother; and when the old couple were laid side by side in the churchyard—where he had sat alone, upright against the high dark oak back, a thriving bachelor, "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes," and afterwards, a staid and serious bridegroom, with his matronly bride; and then again, alone in impregnable widowhood; and, last of all, a proud and happy father, with his little son lifted up beside him into the very place where he had stood between his own parents. Andrew Cleaves had said to himself, as he gazed upon the dead body of his son, that no after circumstance of human life could affect him with the slightest emotion of joy or sorrow; but when he finally made over to another the possession of his old pew, one pang of commingled feeling thrilled through his heart, and moistened the aged eyes that had looked tearlessly into his son's grave.

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CHAPTER XIX.

The next Sunday after the funeral, Andrew Cleaves was at church as usual, but not in his accustomed place. Many pew-doors opened to him, as he walked slowly and feebly up the aisle, and many a hand was put forth to the old man's arm, essaying to draw him in with kindly violence; but gently disengaging himself and silently declining the proffered accommodations, he passed onwards, and took his seat near the communion-table, on the end of one of the benches appropriated to the parish poor; and from that time forward, to the end of his days, Andrew Cleaves was to be seen twice every Sabbath-day in that same place, more dignified in his sorrow and his humility, and perhaps more inwardly at peace, than he had ever been when the world went well with him, and he counted himself a happy man.

Andrew Cleaves was an old man when his great calamity befell him. He had already numbered seven years beyond the age of man—his threescore years and ten; and though he bore up bravely during the time of trial, that time told afterwards tenfold in the account of nature, and he sank for a time almost into decrepit feebleness; yet still the lonely creature crept about as usual, and was seen at his daily labour, and at church and market, and answered all greetings and kindly queries, with courteous thankfulness, and assurances that he was well—quite well, and wanted for nothing, and was content to "tarry the Lord's leisure." But it was easy to see he hoped soon to depart, and all who spoke of him said his time would not be long, "for the old man's strength was going." Nevertheless, it was God's pleasure to delay the summons, which could not but have been welcome, though it was awaited with submissive patience. Andrew Cleaves survived his son's death up-

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wards of nine years, and not only did his strong and sound constitution in great measure recover from the shock which for a time had prostrated its uncommon power, but his mind also settled into a state of such perfect peace, as at times almost brightened into cheerfulness; and never before had he tasted such *pure* enjoyment from the sight of the green earth—of the summer sky, and the sweet influence of the balmy air.

The old man would have been a welcome and respected guest by many a fireside in Redburn village; but at his time of day, it was too late to acquire social habits. It is often easier to break the bondage of a heavy chain, than to disentangle the meshes of a few seemingly slight cords; neither may the tree, which has been warped when a sapling, be made straight when its green branches are all gone, and the bare trunk left scarred and rifted on the heath.

Andrew still dwelt companionless in his paternal cottage, and rarely entered under any other roof, except that of the House of God. But, towards the close of his life, he was more frequently drawn into intercourse with his fellow creatures, than at any former period of his existence. He had continued to support himself, for four years after his son's death, on the sole profits of his garden, and of a little poultry that fed about his cottage; with which small merchandise he still performed his weekly journey to C—— market. But though the "green old age" of honest Greybeard still yielded good and willing service, it was plain to be seen that the crazy cart must soon drop to pieces, and many suspected that there was pinching want in Andrew's cottage, in lieu of the increasing comforts which should afford "a good soft pillow for the old grey head." And, thereupon, much kindly consultation took place among the *magnates* of the parish, how to assist and benefit the old man, without wounding his last lurking feeling of human pride—the pride of living by the honest labour of his own hands, unindebted to parochial or individual charity. An opportunity soon presented itself for the furtherance of their benevolent purpose. The foot carrier, who had long travelled twice a week, to and fro, between C—— and Redburn, be-

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came disabled from continuing his office, the acceptance of which was immediately proposed to Andrew Cleaves, and that a new light cart should be provided for him by subscription among those to whom the regular carriage of packages larger than could be conveyed by a foot carrier, would prove a real accommodation. The old man did not long deliberate. He felt that he could usefully and faithfully acquit himself of the proffered charge, and accepted it with unhesitating gratitude. But when there was further talk of purchasing for him a younger and more efficient steed than honest Greybeard, Andrew shook his head, in positive rejection, and said, smiling, "No, no, *we* must rub on together—the old fellow will do good service yet; and who knows but he may take *me* to my last home?"—And then, for a moment, his brow darkened with a passing shadow, for the thought of the *last burden* of mortality drawn by the old horse came vividly into his mind.

The new cart was provided, the venerable carrier installed into his office, and for five whole years (his remaining span of life) he fulfilled his duties with characteristic faithfulness and exactitude, and almost with the physical energies of his youthful prime. Winter and summer—through frost and snow—and in the dog-day heat—through fair ways and foul—by daylight and twilight—Andrew Cleaves's cart was to be seen nearly about the same place on Redburn Common, at, or near, five o'clock, on the afternoon of Tuesdays and Saturdays, on its return from C——. And it was still drawn lustily along by the same old horse, looking sleek and glossy, and round, quartered like one of Wouverman's Flemings; and when some one, willing to please the master, would now and then pat the sides of the faithful creature, and comment on his handsome appearance, the old man would smile with evident gratification, and say, "Ay, ay, I knew what stuff he was made of—*we* shall last out one another's time—never fear."

So said Andrew Cleaves, towards the close of a long, hard winter; when, though the snow-drifts that still lay in every shady place were not whiter than the once darkly dappled coat of old Greybeard, he showed little other sign of age,

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except, indeed, the rather more deliberate pace in which his kind master indulged him. But though the tardy spring set in at last, mild, warm, and beautiful; and though its renovating spirit seemed to infuse itself, like a renewal of youthful vigour, into the frame of the hale and hearty old man, it was observed that his periodical return from C—— became each time later and later; and that, in spite of the young tender grass on which Greybeard fed at pleasure—and the abundance of bruised corn, and heartening mashes, with which he was tenderly pampered, the sides of the aged creature grew lank and hollow, his fine glossy coat rough and dull, and that his well-set ears, and once erect and sprightly head, dropped low and heavily, as he toiled slowly homeward over the common.

It was some evening in the first week of balmy June, that an inhabitant of Redburn, who expected a consignment by Andrew's cart, set out to meet the vehicle on its return from C——. The man walked on and on, and no cart was seen approaching, and the gloaming was darkening apace, and still no Andrew.

But just as uncomfortable surmises respecting the delay of the venerable carrier began to crowd into his neighbour's mind, the old man came in sight, not in his accustomed driving-seat, but walking by the side of his aged steed, which still drew on the cart with its lightened load, but evidently with painful labour; and when Andrew stopped to deliver out the required parcel, his neighbour remarked to him, that though he himself looked stout and well as usual, his good horse seemed drawing near the last of his journeys.

"Maybe—maybe," gravely replied the old man, laying his arm tenderly across the neck of his aged servant, and looking in the creature's face, as it lifted and half turned round its head with seeming consciousness—"Maybe, master; but who knows, after all, which may go first? Please God, we may yet last out one another's time."

But he himself looked well, and strong as ever, and talked cheerfully all the rest of the way; and that same evening, as was customary with him, walked his rounds, to give account of his multifarious commissions. This was on the

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evening of Saturday, and the next morning Andrew Cleaves was missed at church from his accustomed seat; and no soul that looked towards the vacant place, but knew immediately that the old man was either sick unto death, or that he had already "fallen asleep in Jesus."

When divine service was over, many persons bent their steps towards the lonely cottage; and soon the general expectation (fear on such an occasion would have been an irreligious feeling) was fully verified. The cottage door was closed and locked, and not a lattice open, but prompt admission was effected, and there the venerable inmate was found sitting in his old high-backed chair, before the little claw-table, on which was a small glass of untasted ale, and an unlit pipe beside the open Bible. It seemed at first glance, as if the old man were reading—but it was not so. One hand, indeed, was still spread upon the chapter before him, but his head had dropped down upon his breast, his eyes were closed, and he slept the last sleep of the righteous.

Such were the village annals collected from different narrators, and at divers opportunities, during the better part of a long summer month, which time I employed, or as some would have it, idled away, in fishing the streams in the vicinity of Redburn, taking up my headquarters at the sign of the Jolly Miller. The substance of the story, and all its main facts, were, however, related to me by the loquacious landlady, on the first night of my sojourn under her roof. And she wound up her narrative with further particulars, including the ghost, which had excited such extraordinary tumult in the hitherto quiet village.

Andrew Cleaves had been laid at rest beside the graves of his wife and son, the day before my arrival. The burial charges were defrayed by the sale of that poor remnant of his household goods which yet remained in the cottage, its once-abundant plenishing having gone, piece by piece, during the time of his greatest necessity. The old cottage itself, and its small domain, fell in of course to its reversionary purchaser, the village butcher. And there was no man to say him nay, when he likewise appropriated to himself, as make-weights no doubt in the scale of the dilapidated build-

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ing, its few living appurtenances—Andrew's favourite breed of milkwhite poultry, and his only, his still surviving servant, honest Greybeard. Yes, the poor old creature, fast drooping as he was, did indeed *last out his master's time*, and render him the latest service—for the old man was taken to his grave in his own cart, by his own aged servant—and that was the last task of the poor worn-out brute; and when it was over, his new proprietor turned him loose at the churchyard gate into his own adjoining field, there to linger out the few intervening days, till that when he was destined to furnish a repast to the squire's hounds.

The graves of the Cleaveses lay side by side under the churchyard wall, at that end of the cemetery exactly fronting the entrance. The old man had been committed to the earth on the fourth day from that of his decease; and, some hours after the funeral, a person came hurrying about nightfall into the taproom of the Jolly Miller, affirming, that in his way past the churchyard, having looked accidentally towards the new-made grave, at its further extremity, he had seen distinctly a white spectral shape arise out of the earth, at the head of the dark fresh mound, which strange appearance gradually increased in size and stature, till he was afraid to continue gazing, and ran off to communicate the awful intelligence.

Some laughed at Hodge's story, some bullied, some quaked; but all clamoured and questioned, and finished by running off *en masse* towards the churchyard, headed by the bearer of wonderful tidings, whose courage being of a gregarious nature, became absolute valour with such comfortable backing. Yet did *his* pace slacken perceptibly as he approached the burial-ground, and his followers pressed less impatiently upon his heels; and the whole phalanx, by that time wedged into close order, retrograded simultaneously, when Hodge stopped short with a theatrical start, and stretching forth his right arm, after the fashion of the Prince of Denmark, uttered not exactly the adjuration of the royal Dane, but an exclamation quite as electric to his excited followers.

"There he goes, by gosh!" quoth Hodge, under his breath.

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But all heard the awful words—and all were ready to make oath that, just as they were spoken, they saw something tall, white, vapoury, spectral, sink down into the earth at the head of Andrew Cleaves's grave. Some went so far as to whisper of having caught a glimpse of horns and fiery eyes; and they might have got on to hoofs and a long tail, had not the less imaginative elders rebuked such idle fantasies, and condemned the uncharitable inferences therefrom deducible.

"For why should the Evil One, designated by their fears, be permitted to visit the last earthly resting-place of one whose faith, while living, had baffled his subtlest wiles, and whose immortal part was now, it was humbly to be hoped, beyond the influence of his power?"

But *they*, too—those sober witnesses—had seen *something* —had caught a momentary glance of the white figure as it sank into the earth! and their long-drawn jaws, and solemn doubts, and qualified admission, and pious ejaculations, struck more awe to the hearts of the cowering group than the bolder asseverations of the first speakers. Certain it is, not one of the party proposed to enter the consecrated precincts, and take closer cognizance of the spot, to which all eyes were directed with intense eagerness. But they kept their ground of observation for a considerable time after the vanishing of the phantom; and though mysterious sounds and indistinct glimmerings were still rife in the heated imaginings of many, no further *appearance* was unanimously pronounced to have been visible during that night's watch; and, by degrees, the gazers dispersed, to spread panic and conjecture through the village. No epidemic is more easily disseminated; and by the next day's close, *all* Redburn mustered for the ghost-hunt—which formidable array it was my lot to encounter, when I first entered the straggling street in quest of lodging and entertainment at the village inn. More entertainment than I had reckoned on was, as I have shown, provided for me by my garrulous landlady; and her village gossip had so well eked out the more substantial refreshment of her savoury fare, that time had stolen on unheeded amidst the unwonted quiet of her well-frequented

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house, and darkness had long succeeded the gloaming which lent me light to reach its hospitable shelter. And still the old lady had something more to tell, and I still listened with unwearied ear, when all at once the deep unnatural quiet of the "deserted village" was broken by a confused uproar, like the rushing of an approaching torrent, and in a moment the trampling of many feet and the clattering of many tongues, announced the nearness of the living *torrent*, which came pouring onward in "admired disorder," and pressing head over head, and shoulder against shoulder, into the kitchen of the Jolly Miller. And there were white faces and staring eyes, and chattering teeth, and "horrific hair," but no paralysis of tongues; and, for a while, the confusion of Babel was nothing to that which mingled forty discordant voices, all trying to outpitch one another.

At length, however, I obtained from mine host himself the sum and substance of the *united discords*. His *professional* eye had been acute, even in the midst of the hurly-burly, to discern that a new and respectable-looking guest was located in his house; and I was accordingly favoured with his account of the recent adventure.

"They had watched," he said, "two good hours at the churchyard hatch, in full view of Andrew Cleaves's grave, the exact spot of which was discernible, even after perfect nightfall! and they had taken every possible precaution to satisfy themselves before dark, that no living creature, Christian or brute, was lurking within the churchyard—that there was nothing within it but the green graves and the white tombstones, and the old yew-tree in the northeast angle.

"Well, sir," said mine host, "we watched there, as I made mention, two mortal hours; and though some fancied one thing, and some another, they were nothing but fancies—for nothing better nor worse than we ourselves was stirring all that time; and I, for one, began to think we were making fools of ourselves, and had best sneak home quietly, and say nothing more about the matter. But just then, sir," quavered mine host, glancing fearfully round, and lowering his tone to a whisper, "just then, sir! we *did* see

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something. We *see'd* the tall white thing rise up out of the earth, right at the head of the old man's grave; and then, sir, if you'll believe me, as I am a sinful man, it rose and rose, and spread, till it was as big and high as the gas-work tower—though, for shape, we could not make it much out—only the head of it seemed to shoot up in a kind of forked fashion; and there must have been some sort of unnatural light about it, for my eyes got quite dazed and dizzy like, and there was a ringing in my ears; and then—Lord, sir!—while we were all looking quite steadfast, and standing as steady as a rock, sir!—quite cool and composed—the thing gives a kind of a heave up—so, sir!—and down again; and then there was a terrible noise, just as if the old church tower was tumbling about our ears—and then, we thought, it would be presumptuous to stay any longer, (for rashness is not courage, you know, sir,) and so we came back home again, sir, to talk the matter over quietly."

But neither mine host nor his adherents were in a state to talk the matter over very quietly just then; and all shrank back with unequivocal dismay, when I proposed to head them for a fresh enterprise—myself and two or three others, provided with lanterns, not to flare about the outskirts of the burying-ground, but to make strict search within its haunted precincts—even upon the very grave itself—of which they could not hear without a shudder. By degrees, however—what with shaming their pusillanimity, and patting their courage, and plying them well with mine host's strong beer—I succeeded in enlisting a band of desperate heroes prepared to brave all dangers, and swearing to go with me through fire and water. And off we set at a good round pace, (for some sort of courage is apt to cool if it marches to slow time,) and so reached the churchyard hatch; and dashing through, without a moment's pause, made straight towards the haunted grave. But when we had neared it by a few yards, my doughty heroes made a sudden stop, and I held out my lantern far and high, to throw forward its rays on the strange object which indisputably lay (a long white heap) on Andrew's grave. Just then I struck my foot against a stone, and one behind me stumbled over another

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great rough stone, like those piled together, without masonry, that formed the churchyard wall, close to which lay the three graves of the Cleaveses.

"Oh, ho!" I cheeringly cried out to my trembling followers—"here has been a downfall; but ghosts do not break down stone walls, my men." And on we went, stumbling over like obstacles, and five steps more brought us to the place of terrors; and all the lanterns were held out, every neck poked forward, every eye full stretched—and all fear soon exchanged for loquacious wonder, and pitying exclamation—for there, upon his master's grave, stretched out at full length upon its side, lay the skeleton carcass of Andrew's poor old horse. He had been turned into the butcher's field behind the churchyard, to await, as I have told, the leisure of the squire's hounds. There was a breach in the loose stone wall, exactly at the head of Andrew's grave, and whether it was simply impatience of his new pasture, or whether the creature was really conscious that to the spot below that broken wall he had drawn the remains of his old master, certain it is he must have stationed himself in the gap when first observed by the frightened villagers; and no doubt might have been seen there by daylight, had any one then bethought himself of looking *beyond the grave* toward the adjoining enclosure. And it is equally certain, that on the memorable night of the catastrophe, the poor old animal having raised himself by his forelegs on the lowest part of the breach, the loose stones had given way under his hoofs, and falling forward with them, a helpless, heavy weight, he had breathed out the last feeble remnant of his almost extinguished life, on the scarcely closed grave of his aged master, whose words were verified almost to the letter—"We shall last out one another's time."

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CHAPTER XX.

THE GRAVE OF THE BROKEN HEART.

WITHIN a quarter of a mile of one of the most secluded sea-side hamlets on our western coast, stands its parish-church, a picturesque old building, on a most romantic site—the brow of a richly wooded cliff—the burial-ground forming a sort of table-land of rich sheltered verdure surrounded by noble elms, through the boles of which one may look down on the rolling ocean, so majestically contrasting with its ever-restless billows the unbroken silence and undisturbed tranquillity which reign within that village of the dead. I visited the church and church-yard about sunset on a rich autumnal evening, when the very soul of repose and harmony, pervading earth, air, and sky, seemed to breathe over the holy ground a more holy consecration. There was not a cloud in heaven—not even one purple cloud in the whole flaming occident, where the great glorious orb was slowly sinking into the waveless sea, whose mighty voice was hushed into a lulling and delicious murmur, as the long liquid ridges advanced and receded with caressing gentleness on the broad silver sands. As I entered the lofty burying-ground, its western screen of noble elms stood magnificently dark, in undefined massiness, between me and the glowing sunset; but the golden glory stole in long lines of light through the arches of that living colonnade, burnishing the edges of many a tombstone, its quaint tracery of cross-bones, skull, and hour-glass, and brightening many a nameless turfen heap, as if typical of the robes of light reserved in heaven, even for the lowly righteous, who have passed away from earth unhonoured and unknown.

The church itself stood in deep shadow, except that here

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and there a glittering beam darting through some chink in the dark foliage, kindled the diamond panes of a long narrow window, or gilded the edge of an abutment, or the inner groining of the fine old porch, and on one particular spot, (a thickly ivied gable,) one golden ray streamed like an index, immediately attracting my attention to the object on which it centred, a small oval monumental tablet, wholly unornamented, but well proportioned, of the purest white marble, and to my taste strikingly elegant, from that extreme simplicity, and the singularly beautiful effect of contrast afforded by its rich frame-work of dark green ivy. Of the latter, not a vagrant tendril had been suffered to encroach over the edge of the small tablet, which had been affixed to the wall through a space just cleared to receive it in the verdant arras; and I found, on a nearer scrutiny, that little more than a twelvemonth had elapsed since the insertion of that monumental record. The inscription was still sharp and clear, as if fresh from the chisel, and its purport was framed thus remarkably :—

TO THE MEMORY OF
MILLICENT ABOYNE,
DAUGHTER AND ONLY CHILD OF THE BRAVE
COLONEL ABOYNE,
THIS TABLET IS INSCRIBED BY HER FAITHFUL SERVANT.
SHE DIED AUGUST 10TH, 1——,
IN THE 30TH YEAR OF HER AGE.
OF A BROKEN HEART.

I cannot tell how long I had been gazing on that strangely touching record, when the sound of an approaching footstep caused me to look round, and I saw advancing towards me an old grey-headed man, bearing in one hand a bunch of ponderous keys, his insignia of office, for he was no other than the parish-clerk, who, from his cottage window, which opened into the churchyard, having observed the entrance of a stranger within its sacred precincts, and the apparent interest and curiosity with which I had been surveying the exterior of the church, came courteously forward, (doubtless

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not without some latent view to "*a consideration*,") proffering admittance to the interior of the venerable edifice, and his services as cicerone; and a far more agreeable one he proved than many a pompous guardian of more magnificent temples; and far more pleasingly and profitably I spent that evening hour, within the comparatively humble walls of the village church, listening to the simple annals of that aged chronicler, than I have passed various portions of time among the proud tombs of the mighty dead, rich in the splendour of architectural ornament and imperishable memories, over which all the yearnings of the heart to meditate in solemn silence are effectually marred, by the intrusive chatter of the magpie hireling who follows from tomb to tomb—from chapel to chapel, with voluble impertinence.

My rustic cicerone was very differently qualified; and as he told me, in brief and simple phrase, the history of the few monuments—of some, from personal recollection of the individuals to whose memories they were inscribed—each story acquired additional interest from the venerable aspect of the aged historian, and whose bald uncovered head, thinly encircled by a few white silky locks, the sunbeams darting through some panes of amber-tinted glass in the great west window, shed a halo of golden glory. The deep shadows of evening had almost blended into profound obscurity, ere I left the church, and bade farewell to my venerable guide; but from him I did not separate, ere I had in some degree satisfied my curiosity respecting that small tablet on the ivy wall, on which I was gazing so intently when he courteously accosted me. The old man shook his head in reply to my first query and accompanying remark on the singularity of the inscription.

"Ah, sir!" said he, "that was a sad business—I am afraid some folks have much to answer for. But God only knows all hearts." And then he told me just so much of the story of that poor lady, whose fate was so affectingly recorded, as served to enhance my pleasure at hearing that I might obtain the full gratification of my curiosity, by introducing myself to the faithful old servant who had caused

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the erection of that singular memorial, who still lingered in the vicinity of a spot to her so sacred, and was never so happy as when encouraged by some attentive and sympathizing hearer, to talk of "days lang-syne;"—of the departed glory of her master's house; and above all, of that beloved being, whose motherless infancy she had fostered with all the doting fondness of an Irish nurse, and whose fortunes she had followed through good and through evil, even unto the death, with that devoted attachment so characteristic of her class and country.

That very evening, the sweet hour of gloaming witnessed the beginning of my acquaintance with Nora Carthy, and two hours later, when the uprisen moon showered down its full radiance on the jasmine-covered walls of her low white cottage, I was sitting with my new friend on the bench beside her own door, still listening with unflagging interest to her "thick-coming" recollections, and even to the fondly unconscious repetitions poured out from the fulness of long pent-up feelings.

Many were the after visits I paid to Nora's cottage, and more than once I stood beside the faithful creature on the churchyard sod, under that small marble tablet in the ivy wall; and I shall not easily forget the speechless intensity with which she gazed upon its affecting record, nor the after burst of bitter feelings, when pointing to the green grave beneath, she passionately exclaimed—"And there she lies low—the flower of the world!—laid there by a broken heart!"

I would not venture to relate the somewhat uneventful, but not uninteresting story of Millicent Aboyne, exactly as I heard it from the faithful Nora, whose characteristic enthusiasm, and strong prejudices, combined with her devoted affection for the deceased lady, made it almost impossible that she should afford a fair statement of the painful circumstances, which, in her firm opinion, had consigned the unfortunate Miss Aboyne to an untimely grave. But I had opportunities of comparing poor Nora's relation with information derived from less questionable sources, and so ga-

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thered together, with impartial selection, the details which I shall now attempt to arrange, in memory of my visit to Sea Vale churchyard.

The father of Millicent Aboyne was a descendant of one of the most ancient Milesian families, whose genealogy, had I listened to Nora, I might have given in uninterrupted succession from Brian Boru. But if the royal blood had flowed uncontaminated from generation to generation into the veins of late posterity, a very inconsiderable portion of the royal treasure had been transmitted along with it, and Colonel Aboyne, the last lineal descendant, had still to carve out his fortune with his sword, when the French Revolution dissolved the Irish Brigade in the service of France, as an officer of which corps, and a most accomplished gentleman, he had already been flatteringly distinguished at the Court of the Tuileries.

To Ireland, where the young soldier still possessed a few acres of bog, and the shell of an old tower—the wreck of bygone prosperity—he betook himself on the first overthrow of his Gallic fortunes, with the intention of resuming his military career, as soon as circumstances should permit, in the English service. But a chain of causes, which I shall not take upon me to detail, combined to procrastinate the execution of this purpose, and, at length, so fatally influenced the enthusiastic and high-spirited character of the young soldier, that, without having calculated the consequences of his unguarded zeal in what he considered the cause of the oppressed—far less having contemplated actual rebellion—he found himself deeply involved in the schemes of desperate men, and, finally, sharing with them the penalties of imprisonment, and probably approaching condemnation. The horrors of his fate were bitterly aggravated by anxiety for a beloved wife, to whom he had been lately united, whose very existence seemed bound up with his own—for he had married her a destitute and friendless English orphan—a stranger in a strange land affectingly cast upon his compassionate protection, in her hour of extreme necessity. For her sake life was precious to him on any terms not incompatible with a soldier's honour; and he ventured

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on a plan of escape so hazardous, that none but desperate circumstances could have made it other than an act of madness. It fatally miscarried—for in the act of lowering himself from a wall of immense height, the frail cord to which he trusted failed him, and he was precipitated to the ground—retaken—and reconveyed to his dungeon with a fractured arm and thigh, and such other material injuries, as made it more than doubtful whether his life would be prolonged to pay the probably impending forfeiture. He was, however, spared by divine mercy, and by judicial lenity.

Colonel Aboyne was proved to have been almost unwittingly involved in the guilt of great offenders, from whom justice having exacted the dread penalty, was content to relax from her rigorous demands, in favour of the comparatively innocent; and the almost hopeless prisoner was restored to liberty, and to his young, devoted wife, too blest to receive him back, as it were, from the confines of the grave, though he returned to her, and to their ruinous home—the wreck—the shadow of his former self, with a frame and constitution irreparably injured by the fatal consequences of his late enterprize. The heavy charges of his trial had compelled him to mortgage his small patrimony, on which (thus burdened) it became impossible for him to maintain even his moderate establishment. Ireland was become distasteful to him; and the languishing health of Mrs. Aboyne requiring a milder climate than that of their northern residence, he lent a not unwilling ear to her timidly expressed longing once more to breathe the balmy air of her native Devonshire; and disposing (not without a pang) of Castle Aboyne, and every rood of his diminished heritage, with the small sum thus realized he departed for England; and with his gentle wife, and two faithful servants—Nora Carthy and her husband—was shortly established in a small dwelling at Sidmouth.

More than one season of pensive tranquillity rather than of positive happiness, was permitted them in that beautiful retreat; but the fatal blow had been long struck to the heart of Mrs. Aboyne, and her life, though sinking by almost imperceptible degrees, was not to be prolonged beyond

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the sixth summer of their residence in England. During that interval she had given birth to two children. One only, a little girl, in her fifth year, survived her mother, to be the comfort of her afflicted father, and, as she grew up, the support and blessing of his infirm and solitary state. The faithful Nora had lost her only child about the time of the young Millicent's birth, and she had taken the latter to her bosom, with all the tenderness of a mother, Mrs. Aboyne being unable to nurse her own infant.

Nora was widowed also, before her mistress's death, so that her whole stock of warm affections centered in her orphan nursling, and in the master, whose fortunes she had followed through good and through evil.

The residence of Sidmouth becoming distasteful to Colonel Aboyne, after the death of his beloved companion, he removed, with his little family, to a more secluded spot on the same western coast, the obscure village of Sea Vale, where motives of economy, as well as choice, induced him finally to fix his permanent abode.

Uneventful, but not unblessed, flowed on the existence of the inmates of Sea Vale Cottage, till the young Millicent was grown up into womanhood; in the opinion of her doting father, as fair and perfect a creature as was ever formed in the imperfection of mortal nature, and in that of Nora Carthy, something still more faultless—an earthly angel! —the object of her idol worship, though the warm-hearted Irishwoman, having been brought up by her mistress, Colonel Aboyne's mother, in the Protestant communion, professed to abjure all Popish abominations.

It should have been mentioned earlier in this little narrative, that the parents of Colonel Aboyne were of a divided faith, and that he himself—though educated in his father's tenets—those of the Roman Catholic Church—he had received from his mother's early example, and restricted influence, such a bias in favour of the Reformed religion, as, in after time, when he became the inhabitant of a Protestant country, the husband of a wife of that persuasion, matured into sincere belief in that faith which had been *her* support in the hour of death, and, amid the pangs of separation, the

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mutual pledge of future reunion. It is almost needless to add that the little Millicent was brought up in the belief which had become that of both her parents; but the circumstances of Colonel Aboyne had precluded all possibility of giving her any other advantages of education, beyond those in his own power to impart. Happily his capabilities of tuition extended to the conferring of every thing really valuable, and even beyond those attainments to many of the ornamental acquirements, which, like the capital of a Corinthian pillar, so gracefully surmount the more solid substructure.

The mind of Millicent Aboyne was, therefore, not only stored with sacred knowledge and useful information, but she could read Italian and French with perfect facility, drew landscapes and flowers with more taste and truth than is ever evinced by half the spoiled children of fortune, on whom vast sums have been lavished to entitle them to daub hot-pressed card-board with likenesses of things that never existed in "heaven above or in the earth beneath," and even acquired so much skill in instrumental music, (to accompany a naturally sweet and flexible voice,) as could be taught by her father's crippled hand on an old Spanish guitar, the chords of which he had touched in his youth with such perfect execution, as in unison with vocal powers of uncommon richness, had won for the gay and handsome soldier many a sweet smile and admiring glance from the circle of court beauties, of which Marie Antoinette was the eclipsing cynosure. Many an ear which shrinks fatigued and unedified from astounding *bravuras* and scientific *hors d'œuvres*, running matches against time with scampering accompaniments on grand pianos, might have drunk in delightedly the sweet and perfect melody of two blended voices, harmonizing with now and then a harp-like chord, which often sounded at nightfall from within the small low parlour of Sea Vale Cottage, or from the honeysuckle arbour in its little garden, when the warm summer evenings drew thither the father and his child, with the tea-table, and Millicent's work-basket, the Colonel's old guitar, and his still treasured "Cahier des Romances Nouvelles Imprimés â Paris l'an mil-sept cents quatrevingt douze." But though this vener-

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able récueil was prized by Colonel Aboyne as a relic of the pleasurable days of youthful vanity—when hope was high, and "the world all before him where to choose"—and though visions of "long-faded glories" passed before his eyes as they dwelt on the familiar music, and he hummed unconsciously the old favourite airs, he took far deeper delight in teaching Millicent the songs of his own native land, and in mingling his voice with hers, in those wild and thrilling harmonies. In one of those—the touching Gramachree—the united strains were sweetly swelling, when late in the twilight of a summer evening a solitary stranger strolled down the shady green lane which bounded Colonel Aboyne's garden, and passed close behind the honeysuckle arbour. It was not in nature—not in that stranger's nature—to pass onward unheedful of those melodious sounds which poured forth so unexpectedly as it were in his very path; and there he lingered (for strain succeeded strain) till the bright moon climbed high in heaven, and the unseen harmonists, desisting from their vocal labours, began to converse with each other in such sweet tones of affectionate familiarity as would have riveted the listener's attention even more forcibly than the preceding music, had he not started away from even a momentary indulgence of dishonourable curiosity. His forbearance was not unaccompanied, however, by views of ultimate compensation; and no later than the following morning, the village doctor, a worthy and sensible man, ever a welcome visitant at Sea Vale Cottage, was accompanied, in his early visit to its inmates, by a stranger of prepossessing appearance, whom he introduced to Colonel and Miss Aboyne as the Rev. Mr. Vernon, the new curate of Sea Vale.

Horace Vernon was one of many children, the orphans of a deceased clergyman; and his widowed mother had strained her overburdened means to the very uttermost to continue him at the university for two years after his father's sudden and untimely death.

Beyond that important period she was powerless to assist him; and when he was so fortunate as to obtain the desirable curacy of Sea Vale, on entering into holy orders, her

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maternal anxieties, so far relieved on his account, were naturally engrossed by the more pressing claims of her younger children. Horace was well content with his allotted station. From his earliest recollection, accustomed to retirement, and to the strict, though respectable frugality of his father's household, and subjected, during the greater part of his college life, to the innumerable privations and mortifications inseparable from the station of a poor scholar among the wealthy and the prodigal, he had acquired no habits or ideas inimical to the life of obscure usefulness apparently designed for him. There had never been any rational prospect of his obtaining church preferment, unless he should fag his way up the clerical ladder by college tutorship, or private connexions otherwise formed at the university; and this course he might have pursued successfully, had his father lived to continue him at college, and to excite him to the necessary exertions. But his was not an energetic character: it was amiable, affectionate, and feeling—endowed with no inconsiderable share of talent, much refined and elegant taste, and a sincere desire of acting up to every moral and religious principle. Add to this a very handsome person and engaging address, a little leaven of vanity, and a too great liability to be influenced, even against his better judgment, by the graceful and showy, in opposition to more solid but less attractive qualities, and the sketch of Horace Vernon's character will be faithful as a mere outline. This little history affords no scope for Flemish painting.

So constituted and endowed, the young curate settled himself very contentedly at Sea Vale, and was not long in making a most favourable impression on all classes throughout the parish. He was unaffectedly earnest in his pulpit duties, and not less anxious to fulfil all others annexed to his pastoral charge. And he did fulfil them very respectably, and so as to give almost general satisfaction; though, it must be confessed, not without occasionally yielding, and often doing violence, to certain feelings of morbid refinement, which revolted with sickening disgust from many of those scenes of human misery which must come under the

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eye of the zealous minister, and from which the faithful follower of Him who "went about doing good," will not shrink back with fastidious weakness.

Exactly twelve months from that sweet summer evening when Horace Vernon was arrested in his first stroll round the village, thenceforth to be his home, by the plaintive air of "Gramachree," breathed in vocal unison from behind the high holly hedge which separated him from Colonel Aboyne's garden—exactly a twelvemonth from that well-remembered evening—the young curate was seated in the arbour *within* that holly hedge, and *his* voice, in lieu of her father's, was mingling with that of Millicent Aboyne in the same touching harmony, while her hand lightly swept the chords of the old guitar; and Colonel Aboyne, reclining comfortably in his large arm-chair, the "Cahier de Romances Nouvelles" lying on his cushioned footstool, gazed with tender complacency on the twain, thenceforth to be inseparably united in his affections—for his Millicent was the affianced wife of Horace Vernon.

Such had been the very natural, the almost inevitable result of an acquaintance and intimacy formed between two amiable and attractive young persons, brought perpetually together under such circumstances as characterized the intercourse of Horace Vernon and Millicent Aboyne. Had they become acquainted in the concourse of the world, or even been thrown together in a circle rather more diversified than that small group which constituted their world at Sea Vale, it is possible, nay even probable, that neither would have conceived for the other a warmer sentiment than kindness and friendly interest, for in many points they differed essentially; and Millicent, more than two years older than Vernon, gentle and serious almost to pensiveness, elegant and pleasing in person rather than strikingly beautiful, and characterized by peculiar diffidence and simplicity of manner, would hardly have been distinguished among the more youthful, the more brilliant, the more showily accomplished, by one so peculiarly liable as was Horace Vernon, to be captivated by those graces which excite most general admiration.

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But he had never mixed in general society—had never, in the small circle of his connexions and acquaintance, seen any thing half so fair, so elegant and attractive, as the sweet Millicent. The high-bred manners of Colonel Aboyne were also delightful to his really refined taste; and the kind hospitality with which he was ever welcomed at Sea Vale Cottage, won on his best affections, while the tastes and pursuits of its inmates awakened his warmest sympathies. No wonder that, under such circumstances, Horace should attach himself devotedly to Miss Aboyne, nor that she, whose intercourse with the world had been even more limited than her lover's, should return his affection with the warmth and truth of a first and perfect tenderness, without questioning with herself whether the amiable and engaging qualities which had won her unpractised heart, were built upon that stable groundwork which formed the basis of her own gentle and diffident character. Essentially requisite it was to the present peace and future happiness of Horace and Millicent, that the virtues of patience and stability should be among their leading characteristics—for prudence, or rather necessity, deferred to a distant period their hope of being united.

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CHAPTER XXI.

It was not indeed till the twelfth month of their acquaintance that Vernon had ventured to declare to Colonel Aboyne his attachment to his daughter, and to ask his parental sanction to their future union. To this step he had been emboldened by the promise of a small living from an old friend and college pupil of his deceased father; and the present incumbent being far advanced in years, there was a rational prospect of Vernon's becoming, at no remote period, master of such a moderate competence as might enable him to marry, without subjecting the object of his affections to the miseries of genteel poverty.

Colonel Aboyne, who had become warmly attached to Horace, was well content to accept his proposals for that darling daughter, the thought of whose friendless and well-nigh destitute condition, in the event of her becoming an orphan, not only banished sleep too often from his pillow, but wrapped him in many a fit of deep and sad abstraction, while listening—apparently listening—to the sweet music of her silvery voice, or sitting with her at the social board, where she "gaily prest and smiled," unconscious of the feelings she inspired. His consent was therefore cordially and joyfully yielded; and to Horace and Millicent, the state of sanctioned and untroubled happiness which succeeded their betrothment, seemed for a time so near the perfection of earthly felicity, that even he (the more impassioned, but not more devoted, of the twain) contemplated, with tolerable equanimity, the possible intervention of the two or three years (a very reasonable allowance of life to the old incumbent) between his present condition of probationary bliss, and the union which was to render it complete. Almost domesticated with Colonel Aboyne and his daughter, to the

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former he looked up with filial affection and respect; and his more tender and intimate association with Millicent's finely-constituted mind, insensibly led to the happiest results in his own character, which gradually settled into a steadiness of pursuit and principle well befitting his sacred profession, and holding out the fairest promise of wedded happiness to his affianced wife, who already went hand in hand with her destined partner in all the sweet and holy charities constituting so essential a portion of pastoral duty. Never, perhaps—allowing for the alloy which must temper all earthly happiness—were assembled happier persons than the three sitting together, as lately described, under the honeysuckle arbour in Colonel Aboyne's garden, in the warm twilight of that sweet summer evening.

Horace and Millicent had returned from a long ramble, and many benevolent visits among the more distant cottagers of their extensive parish. They had felt that "where the eye saw, it blessed them;" and the tender and serious heart of Millicent, in particular, overflowed with that blissful conviction, and with the delightful assurance, that her *heavenly*, as well as her *earthly* parent, did indeed sanction her intended union, and that her lot, and that of her chosen partner, cast as it was in the quiet vale of sweet retirement and safe mediocrity, where, nevertheless, opportunities of doing good would be abundantly afforded, was one so peculiarly favoured, that while she thought thereon tears swelled into her dove-like eyes, and she faltered out something of her feelings (for what tongue could speak them fluently?) to him on whose arm she leaned in tender and perfect confidence. So time passed on with the betrothed lovers, accompanied in its progress by all of pleasantness and enjoyment that could compensate for protracted expectation. And on, and on it passed—still pleasantly—still happily, on the whole, but to a length of probation so little anticipated by Vernon—so unchangeable as to any immediate prospect of termination—that something of the sickness of hope deferred began to steal into his heart, and now and then betrayed itself, even to Millicent, by a fretful tone or word, or

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a look of languor and sullenness, even in the midst of occupations and interests, which to *her* had lost nothing of their soothing and salutary influence.

A year—two—three—four years—(in truth, an awful amount in the sum of human life!)—passed on, at first swiftly and happily, then with more tedious pace, and at last heavily, and sometimes sadly, at Sea Vale Cottage. Still existing circumstances were precisely the same with all parties, as when, four summers back, they felt themselves the happiest and most contented of human beings. But as years crept on with Colonel Aboyne, his anxiety to see his child securely established became naturally greater, and he could not but occasionally observe and lament that though Vernon's attachment to Millicent suffered no apparent diminution, feelings of despondency and irritability were growing fast upon his character, where they might acquire a fatal influence not to be counteracted hereafter by the tardy operation of happier circumstances. And Millicent! she was too well aware, even more so than her father, of the morbid change which was effecting in her lover's mind, composed as it was by nature of gay and happy elements. Poor Millicent!—how many thorns had already sprung up in that peaceful path, which but so lately she had accounted peculiarly favoured! Vernon's affection for her, though less ardently demonstrated than when they first exchanged their plighted troth, she verily believed to be entire and sincere as in those halcyon days; and her feelings towards him had but matured into deeper and more holy tenderness—entire and self-devoting, such as only woman's heart can cherish—not blind to the imperfections of the beloved object, though sweetly extenuating and excusing them with unconscious ingenuity. Miss Aboyne could not but observe also, that the broad open brow of her dear father was more frequently contracted with deep and open lines than she had ever yet seen imprinted there; and she fancied, too, (it *might* be *only* fancy,) that there was a perceptible change in his whole person and deportment, as if Time were hurrying him on with more hasty strides than the imperceptibly downward pace of natural decline.

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Millicent's tender apprehensions were not wholly groundless: Colonel Aboyne's constitution, impaired by former severe suffering, had of late felt the pernicious influence of increased mental disquietude, and again, the physical ailment reacting on the moral, brought on a train of those nervous miseries scarcely to be repelled by any effort of reason and self-control, even when perfectly imaginary; and unhappily there was too much reason for Colonel Aboyne's uneasiness. He persuaded himself the hour was fast approaching which would make his daughter not only a friendless, but almost a destitute orphan, her sole inheritance comprising the small cottage they inhabited, and a sum of money scarce amounting to hundreds, though the accumulated whole of his small annual savings, religiously hoarded, with whatever sacrifice of his own comforts, since the hour of his darling's birth. The circumstances of her engagement to Horace Vernon were such as would also render her situation one of greater difficulty, if the period was still to be deferred when she might be taken from a father's to a husband's home; and while revolving all these perplexities in his sleepless and solitary hours, Colonel Aboyne was almost inclined to yield to the frequently impatient proposals of Horace for his immediate union with Millicent; and that, leaving fearlessly to Providence all care for the future, they might form, for the present, one humble and contented family, under the peaceful roof of Sea Vale Cottage. But Colonel Aboyne was too well aware of the distresses which might tread close on such a measure to sanction it, except as one of imperious necessity; and at length, after long and harassing reflection, he determined on the execution of a project, to which nothing less than overpowering anxiety for his beloved child could have reconciled his high spirit and fastidious feelings. It was no less an enterprise (great indeed to the long-secluded valetudinarian) than to revisit the land of his birth—the home of his forefathers, in the forlorn hope of recovering from a distant kinsman the amount of a pecuniary loan, lent in the generous confidence of unsuspicious youth, without further security than the word of a friend, which

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sacred pledge had not however been redeemed, on Colonel Aboyne's written application, soon after his first establishment in England; and, high-spirited as he was, no personal consideration could have compelled a second remonstrance. But for his child!—his child!—what sacrifice would he not make! what difficulties would he not encounter! His resolve was made, declared, and speedily acted upon, in spite of the tender dissuasions of Millicent, and the fainter opposition of Vernon. New vigour seemed granted to him for the prosecution of his arduous undertakings; and cheerfully reassuring his anxious and drooping child, he firmly negatived her tender petition to accompany him to Ireland, on the reasonable grounds that it would not only increase their embarrassments if he failed in the object of his expedition, but at all events protract his absence from Sea Vale.

The day was fixed for Colonel Aboyne's departure, and the preceding evening was the saddest ever spent together by the father and daughter in that dear cottage which had been so long the scene of their domestic happiness. Autumn was somewhat advanced, but the glorious light of a cloudless harvest-moon shone full into the little parlour casement, near which sat together the parent and the child, side by side, her hand within her father's—and they were both silent. Only, when Colonel Aboyne fondly kissed the pale soft cheek which rested on his shoulder, and the full closed eyelids, with their long lashes trembling through tears in the moonbeam, poor Millicent turned her face inward on her father's bosom, and the suppressed grief half-vented itself in deep short sobs.

"Be of good comfort, dearest!" said her father, mastering his own emotion—"Cheer up, my Milly! Remember I am going to leave you but for a short—a very short time. You and I have spoiled each other, Milly! We have been too much together; I should have sent my darling sometimes away from me, to have accustomed her to live without her old father—and there is *one*, Milly! who, if I were gone"——but poor Milly's thick-coming sobs told him those were not words of comfort; and after a minute's silence, to

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calm the tremor in his own voice, he resumed, in freer accents—"Look up, Milly! at that bright full moon—before it is dwindled to a silver thread, you may hear that I am on my way home again; and look up, Milly! and see how gloriously it shines upon us—we will for once believe in omens, and take its bright promise for"——Millicent looked up just as her father stopped so abruptly—a huge black bar was drawn across the star of promise; and in a few seconds, while father and daughter were still gazing earnestly upwards, the beautiful luminary was totally eclipsed.

The next morning found Millicent and her faithful Nora sole inhabitants of Sea Vale Cottage. Vernon had accompanied Colonel Aboyne to the place of embarkation—an opportunity of confidential intercourse with his future son-in-law gladly embraced by the anxious traveller. To Vernon he spoke unreservedly of his own internal conviction, that in spite of that present renovation, which he gratefully acknowledged as providentially granted for the prosecution of his immediate purpose, the termination of his earthly sojourn was at no great distance. He spoke of her who would then be a destitute orphan, and he accepted, as solemnly as it was offered, Horace Vernon's voluntary promise, in case of an unfavourable issue to his present undertaking, and of life not being spared him to return to Sea Vale, then to take to himself his affianced wife so soon as he could win her consent to accompany him to the altar—and taking up his abode with her under that lowly roof, which would be wellnigh all the poor Millicent's portion, resolve for her sake cheerfully to contend with present—even protracted difficulties—and so await (patiently trusting in Providence) those better days they were reasonably encouraged to look forward to. It was also settled between the friends, that, with Millicent's consent, the same arrangement should take place soon after Colonel Aboyne's return from Ireland, were that return permitted, though unblessed by a favourable result to the business which impelled him thither.

So having spoken, and confided to each other their mutual wishes and anxieties, the old man and the young one,

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the almost father and son, parted at the place of embarkation, with a fervent blessing and a short farewell—and from Colonel Aboyne, as he stepped into the boat, a look to Vernon, and an emphatic pressure of the hand, which, more touchingly than language, commended the absent Millicent to her lover's protection.

If soberizing time and protracted expectation had abated somewhat of Vernon's first enthusiastic passion, his feelings for Millicent were still those of sincere and tender interest; and with all the affecting circumstances of his late parting with her father fresh in his recollection, it was with a revival of even more than former tenderness that he met her on his return at the little garden-gate before the cottage, of which she was now the sole sad occupant. Deep and fervent was at that moment his unuttered vow to be indeed friend, father, protector, husband—every thing to the dear and gentle being who might so soon be dependent on him for her all of earthly comfort. Few words passed between them at their first greeting. Vernon hastened to answer Millicent's enquiring look with an assurance that all was well with her dear father when they parted; and then the two entered the cottage together, and seated themselves in the small bay window, neither, however, occupying the large arm-chair, which stood with its cushioned footstool in the accustomed place. Both looked towards it, and Vernon, perceiving the direction of Millicent's tearful glance, and well comprehending the subject of her fond solicitude, exerted himself to comfort and reassure her, till by degrees he lured her into the indulgence of more cheerful thoughts and happier expectations. But as he looked earnestly in her mild fair face, he was struck with the increased transparency of a complexion, always peculiarly delicate, but now beautiful with an almost fearful beauty; for the naturally pale, though clear and healthful cheek, now bloomed with a spot of the brightest carnation; and quickly glancing at the hand he held within his own, he almost started at observing its sickly hue and evident attenuation.

"Are you well, Milly?" he asked abruptly, "quite well, dearest Millicent? This little hand tells a feverish tale—

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and those cheeks!—fie! fie! Milly! *You* have been a self-tormentor of late." And he was but half satisfied with her assurance that she was not ill—had nothing to complain of, only a little occasional languor—and now that he had brought her such consoling tidings of her dear father's progress, she would rouse herself to hope and cheerfulness, and the resumption of all their favourite pursuits and occupations.

When Nora opened the cottage gate to let out Vernon that evening, he lingered a moment to speak a kind word or two to the faithful old servant, and then, suddenly reverting to his late startling observations, he said, "Millicent has been worrying herself to death, Nora, with anxiety about her father. We must take better care of her and prevent this, or she will fret herself into a fever; I was quite struck this evening with her altered looks." "And was you indeed?—and time you should, maybe," answered Nora, in her driest and least cordial tone—for *she* had long discerned a change in her darling's health and spirits, which had escaped even the parental eye; and with the shrewd quickness of doting affection, she had not failed to remark, that though the affianced lovers were together as much as formerly, and though they met and parted, to all appearance, as affectionately as ever, their separation was too often followed by a cloud on Millicent's brow, which had not been used to hang there during such brief absences; and more than once Nora had surprised her weeping in her own little chamber, after her return from a walk with Vernon. It was therefore that she replied to his questions with almost reproachful coldness; but her slight and vague displeasure was soon appeased by the unaffected warmth with which he now poured forth the apprehensions she had succeeded in rousing so effectually; and he slept not that night for thinking of Millicent's burning hand and crimsoned cheek, and for wishing it were day that he might revisit the cottage, and urge her to see their good friend the village apothecary, and consult him respecting those symptoms of feverish debility, which he was now persuaded had been long hanging about her, though his own perceptions of the evil had been so tardily

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awakened. Full of these anxious thoughts and intentions, he presented himself at Millicent's breakfast-table, just as she had descended from her own chamber; but felt almost immediately reassured by a first glance at the now natural hue of her fair complexion, the calm smile with which she greeted his appearance, and the soft coolness of the hand extended to meet his with affectionate welcome. His previous anxiety, and his earnest wish that she should consult Mr. Henderson, were not left unmentioned, however; but, by the time breakfast was over, Millicent had so well succeeded in talking and smiling him out of his fears, that when Nora came in to remove the tea equipage, he could not forbear casting towards her one glance of almost reproachful exultation, which, however, obtained no other return than a look of discouraging seriousness.

But after a little time, even Nora's fond apprehensiveness began to yield to the comforting evidences of her darling's daily renovation. Long, and frequent, and satisfactory letters arrived from Ireland—satisfactory at least as to the point she had most at heart, the welfare of her beloved father. Colonel Aboyne gave her the most positive assurances, that he had received unexpected and extraordinary benefit, from the stimulating effects of his voyage and journey, and the influence of his native air; and in his first letter, he expressed sanguine hope of a favourable result to the business he was engaged in. Succeeding accounts, however, became on that head more discouraging. Colonel Aboyne's flattering expectations were soon overclouded—at last totally relinquished; but still he wrote cheerfully, consolingly,—spoke of himself as returning as poor a man, indeed, as when he left his Milly and their dear cottage, but a renewed one in health and vigour, and again looking forward with tranquil hope, not only to the union of his children, (for so he called both Horace and Millicent,) but, with God's blessing, to see them assured of that moderate competence which had already been withheld so far beyond the term of human calculation. And then Vernon breathed into Millicent's ear the arrangements which had been entered into by her father and himself, respecting their almost

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immediate union on Colonel Aboyne's return from Ireland, whatever might be the result of his visit to that country; and Millicent, though she listened with surprise and agitation, did not refuse to ratify a compact so tenderly and sacredly hallowed.

Colonel Aboyne's last brief letter was merely to mention the day of his embarkation, and that on which, to an *almost certainty*, he might be expected at Sea Vale; "and even *now*," he wrote—"while I trace these few last lines, methinks I see our own dear cottage, my Milly looking anxiously out for me from the garden gate, and Horace advancing down the green lane, in readiness to receive the old cripple, and help him carefully down the ladder-steps of the stupendous Highflyer. Be there both of you, my children, that we may together re-enter that peaceful abode, soon, I hope, to shelter us *all* beneath its roof, one united and contented family of love."

But God had appointed otherwise. On the evening of that day, which should have restored the father and the friend to his expecting dear ones, there was a sound of weeping and lamentation, of "woman's wail," within the darkened parlour of Sea Vale Cottage, where three persons were assembled together, (all distinction of rank forgotten in the common sorrow,) to mingle their tears for the long absent—the fondly expected—who was never more to re-enter his earthly habitation—whose "place was to know him no more."

The packet on board which Colonel Aboyne had taken his passage, had foundered in mid-channel; and of the few who were saved, he was not. Millicent was an orphan!

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CHAPTER XXII.

AUTUMN was fast fading into winter, when the heavy tidings of her sudden bereavement fell like an ice-bolt on the heart of Miss Aboyne. And long it was before the unremitting tenderness and attention of her now sole earthly protector—her betrothed husband—and the more than maternal cares of her faithful Nora, were rewarded by any indications of reviving health and cheerfulness in the object of their mutual anxiety.

Passing the common love between parent and child, had been that which bound up, as in one, the hearts of Colonel Aboyne and his motherless daughter; and the reflection that, for *her* sake, this beloved father had undertaken the voyage which had terminated so fatally, failed not to dash her cup of sorrow with peculiar bitterness. The suddenness of the shock had also tried to the uttermost her delicate and already impaired constitution; and for a considerable time it required all the sedulous care of love and fidelity, and all the skill and unremitting watchfulness of her medical adviser, to avert the threatening symptoms of decline.

But not only was Millicent Aboyne too truly a Christian to sorrow like those who have no hope, but even in *this world* she felt and gratefully acknowledged that she *had hopes*, and dear ones; and that, if it pleased God to restore her to health, the after life that was to be passed with the husband of her choice, to whom she had been consigned, in a manner, by the dying breath of her beloved father, would be one of sweet contentedness. Therefore, when she prayed fervently to be reconciled to God's will in *all things*, she thought it *no* sin to add to that petition a humble and pathetic supplication for continued life, if he saw that it was expedient for her; and the boon so submissively im-

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plored was, to present appearance, graciously conceded. Returning health once more re-invigorated the long-drooping frame, and again there was hope, and cheerfulness, and innocent enjoyment, and sweet companionship, in the orphan's home. Then it was that Vernon began to urge her on the subject of an immediate union, with affectionate and forcible persuasion; and Millicent was too well aware of the reasonableness of his arguments, and too nobly free from all taint of affectation, to hesitate a moment in acceding to his entreaties, except from motives of tender reluctance to exchange her mourning dress for bridal raiment, before the expiration of a twelvemonth from the time of her irreparable loss. She was also desirous, with God's blessing, to feel her health more perfectly re-established before she took upon herself the responsibility of new and important duties; and finally, a compromise between the lovers was definitively arranged, that in three months from that last May morning which completed the sixth month from her father's death, Millicent Aboyne should become the wife of Horace Vernon.

Few, on either side, were the requisite marriage preparations. Little of worldly goods had each wherewith to endow the other. On Vernon's side, only the small stipend of his curacy; on that of Millicent, no more than the property of her little cottage, and the broken sum of that small hoard, which was all Colonel Aboyne had been enabled to bequeath to his orphan daughter. Added to her scanty heritage was, however, one heirloom, justly valued by Millicent as a jewel of great price. The faithfully devoted Nora was never to be sundered from her foster-child; and with her aid and experience, the latter smilingly promised Vernon, that comfort and frugality should go hand in hand in their future establishment. Already Horace had assumed the management, not only of Millicent's flower-beds, but of the whole productive and well-arranged little garden; and he never quitted the small domain to return to his solitary corner of the large rambling old rectory, (occupied in part payment of his scanted dues,) without longing more and more impatiently for the approaching hour, when the gentle

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mistress of Sea Vale Cottage should admit him there, the wedded partner of her humble and happy home.

One morning Vernon entered Millicent's little sitting-room with an open letter in his hand, which he flung into her lap as she sat at work, with an air of half jesting, half serious discomposure. "There, Milly!" said he; "read that—and you may expect me to come and take up my abode here *directly*, whether you will or not. Perverse girl! if you had not doomed me to such long exclusion, I should not now be annoyed by the contents of that provoking letter. Read, read, Milly! and revoke my sentence." The letter so ungraciously commented on was nevertheless an exceedingly well-turned, well-bred epistle, from no less a personage than the honourable and reverend Dr. Hartop, Vernon's rector, and the rector and holder of more than one other valuable living and comfortable piece of church preferment. He had not visited his Sea Vale flock since it had been committed to the care of the present curate; but his physician having recommended sea air and quiet, as restoratives after a long enfeebling illness, and cherishing in his own mind an affectionate recollection of the lobsters and turbot that frequent those happy shores, the honourable and reverend gentleman forthwith felt a conscientious call to bestow his pastoral presence for the summer months among his coast parishioners. He was to be accompanied in his retirement by the youngest of eight portionless daughters of his brother-in-law, the Earl of Marchwood, who, as well as his amiable Countess, was always magnanimously ready to spare either of their blooming treasures, to enliven the solitude of their wealthy and reverend uncle, and smooth his gouty footstool. The noble parents would, indeed, have extended the sacrifice to any number of the fair bevy Dr. Hartop might have been pleased to put in requisition; but that highly conscientious person not only revolted from exacting too much from such *all-conceding* generosity, but felt a strong conviction that his personal comforts would be more attended to, and the orthodox regularity of his household less deranged, by *one* of the lovely sisters, than if he had availed himself of the liberally-granted privilege to sum-

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mon them in divisions. The privilege of selection he, however, exercised without scruple; and on the present occasion, was to be accompanied to Sea Vale by his favourite niece, Lady Octavia Falkland, a very lovely, gay, good-humoured, captivating creature of nineteen—"toute pêtrie d'esprit," said her French governess—brilliantly accomplished, and (*as every body said*) "with the best heart in the world."

Lady Octavia was perfect, in short—or would have been, but for some of those trifling alloys inseparable from *earthly* perfection; such as a *little* vanity, a *little* selfishness, a *little* cunning, and a *little* want of principle. To leave London in full season, with an old valetudinarian uncle, for "the ends of the earth," was, however, such a heroic sacrifice to duty as Lady Marchwood failed not to turn to good account, by descanting thereon, with maternal sensibility, in the hearing of all with whom the touching trait was likely to *tell*—especially in the presence of a young Earl of immense property, lately come of age, and as yet encumbered with a few rustic prejudices in favour of religion and morality, the fruit of much seclusion with a sickly methodistical mother, who had early instilled into the heart of her only child, "that peculiar way of thinking" which had strangely supported her through trials of no common character. Lord M—— had been evidently struck by the beauty of the fair Octavia, and as evidently captivated by her engaging sweetness. He had danced with her, talked with her, and, as was clearly perceptible to Lady Marchwood's discriminating eye, *watched* her still more assiduously; and still he spake not—and on one or two late occasions, as he became more familiar with the *home* circle of Marchwood House, he had *looked* startled and uncomfortable at some interesting *naiveté* of the Lady Octavia, (who, to do her justice, was seldom off her guard in his company;) and then there was such a visible *réfroidissement*—a something so like drawing back, in his demeanour towards the lady, that her affectionate mamma, having lectured her pathetically on the consequences of her indiscretion, thought there was something quite providential in the Sea Vale scheme, of

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which she purposed to make the most in Lord M——'s hearing in the manner aforesaid. "And then," said she, "Octavia, when he comes down to us in the autumn, as you know he has half promised, if you WILL but be prudent for a *little while*, and fall naturally into his odd tastes and fancies, depend on it he *will speak*." Which maternal consolation, combined with private visions of other contingent rewards to be coaxed out of the rich old uncle, and her constitutional good temper, enabled the fair exile to submit to her fate with a degree of resignation, not less edifying than amazing, considering she was aware of all its horrors—of the perfect seclusion of Sea Vale, where the curate and apothecary were likely to be the only visiters at the rectory. The said rectory was a large, old-fashioned, but not incommodious mansion, of which, as has been said, a couple of rooms were occupied by Horace Vernon.

Dr. Hartop's letter (which had been so ungraciously received) very politely requested that Mr. Vernon would consider himself his guest during his, the Doctor's, residence at Sea Vale; and then went on to bespeak Horace's obliging superintendence of certain arrangements and alterations respecting furniture, &c. &c., especially in the apartments designed for the occupation of his niece, Lady Octavia Falkland. This letter was brought by the first division of the household; and Dr. Hartop and Lady Octavia were to be expected at Sea Vale in a week at furthest.

"And the old rectory is half turned out of window already," said Vernon, pettishly, when he had told his story, and Millicent had glanced over the Doctor's letter—"and a whole waggon-load of things is arrived—couches, chaises-longues, a French bed, a whole steam kitchen, and a huge harp case among the rest. I dare say *that* Lady Octavia is very fine and disagreeable."

"A most candid conclusion, truly!" observed Millicent with a smile,—but it was a *half* smile only; for in heart she was as much annoyed as Horace by the intelligence he had communicated. In former days, the arrival of these strangers would have been a matter of indifference to her, or perhaps of cheerful interest; but at present, scarcely re-

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covered from the effects of recent affliction—shrinking from the eye of strangers with a morbid timidity, which, from long seclusion, had grown upon her natural diffidence—still enfeebled in health, and not unconscious that her present situation was one of peculiar delicacy, Miss Aboyne would have indeed preferred that the Rector and Lady Octavia's visit to Sea Vale should have been deferred till *after* her union with Horace Vernon. Perhaps if he had, at that moment, more seriously enforced his jesting petition, to be forthwith admitted to the peaceful sanctuary of Millicent's cottage, she might have been induced to rescind her former decision, and cede to him, without further delay, the possession of herself and of her little dwelling. But Vernon talked away his vexation, and Millicent kept hers within her own heart, secretly chiding its utter unreasonableness; for what would the stranger be to her? She should not see or be seen by them but at church, and then, why need she shrink from observation,—if, indeed, one so insignificant should attract any?

The preparations at the rectory went briskly on, and as the new and elegant articles of ornamental furniture were unpacked, Vernon insensibly became interested in examining them, and superintending the arrangements of Lady Octavia's boudoir. An elegant harp was extracted from its cumbrous case by a servant intrusted with the key, and, together with music-stands and stools, a painting easel, sundry portfolios, inlaid work-boxes, &c. &c., disposed in picturesque order in the dedicated chamber, and a pile of Italian music, two or three volumes of Italian and English poems, some French novels, and one of Schiller's dramas in the original, arranged with good effect on the different tables and *chiffonnières* by the well-trained footmen, gave the *tout-ensemble* an air of so much literary elegance, as failed not to make due impression on Vernon's tasteful imagination, and in some measure to soften down his prejudice (so unwarrantably imbibed!) against the unknown possessor. But still he had settled in his own mind, that in her deportment to *himself*, she would be reserved, distant, and disagreeable; and he promised himself to be as little as possible in her au-

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gust presence. This preconception and predetermination savoured far less of judicious reasoning and amiable humility, than of ignorance of the world, and lurking vanity and pride; but it has been observed, that the latter were among Vernon's besetting sins, and the former was the unavoidable result of circumstances.

The important day arrived, and from the porch of Miss Aboyne's cottage, (in and out of which he had been fidgeting for the last hour,) Vernon spied a travelling carriage and four descending the hilly approach into Sea Vale. "There they are, Milly!" he exclaimed, suddenly letting fall her arm that had been resting on his, and starting involuntarily a few paces forward—"and I must be gone to receive the Doctor and that fine Lady Octavia. It's all your fault, Milly, when I might have remained here, if you had pleased, and been independent of all this fuss and bustle;" and he turned back and took both her hands, gazing on her for a moment with a look of reproachful tenderness. "And how pretty and quiet every thing here looks this evening!" he added, glancing round him; "and we should have had some music in the honeysuckle arbour now you can sing again, Milly."—"Perhaps," replied she, faintly smiling, "Lady Octavia will sing to you."—"Oh! if she were to condescend so far, I should hate *her* singing; and that fine harp would never sound half so sweet to me as the dear old guitar, Milly."—Millicent thanked him with a look for the fond unreasonableness of the lover-like assertion, and then hastened him away to receive, with honour due, his honourable and reverend Rector. To say the truth, when his really affectionate feelings for her had given utterance to those few hurrying words, he did not seem *very* loath to obey her injunction; and, when he had cleared the green lane at three bounds, and turned the corner towards the rectory, he stopped a moment to take off his hat, run his fingers through the bright waves of his fine thick hair, and pull up his shirt-collar to the most becoming altitude.

The rectory and Miss Aboyne's cottage were situated at opposite extremities of the straggling village; and the distance between the two habitations being so inconsiderable,

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Millicent thought it not improbable she might see Horace again that evening, after Dr. Hartop's late dinner, or before the hour of retiring. More than once after twilight, and in spite of the fast falling dews, she returned to the garden gate, to listen if a well-known footstep were coming down the lane; and that night, long after the usual hour of its disappearance, a light was burning in Millicent's little parlour. But it was extinguished at last; and all was darkness, and quiet, and sweet rest probably, under the humble roof of the orphan's cottage.

The next morning, as Millicent was seated at her early breakfast, the little casement opened from without, and Vernon's handsome face, radiant with smiles and cheerfulness, looked in between the clustering roses. "What vulgar hours you keep, Milly," said he; "I'm positively ashamed of you, Miss Aboyne! *We* are in our first sleep yet at the rectory, and sha'n't breakfast these three hours."

"Look, then," she smilingly replied, "at this tempting bowl of rich new milk, and this brown bread, and fresh yellow butter of Nora's own making—and the tea is as strong as *you* like it—see!—and such cream!—there can be none such at the rectory. Won't all these delicacies tempt you to breakfast with me?"—"Half of them—the least of them, dearest!" he answered, twisting himself dexterously in through the window, demolishing a whole garland of roses, and upsetting a work-table and a glass of flowers, in his unceremonious *entrée;* in spite of which high crime and misdemeanour, in two minutes he was seated with the ease of perfect innocence at Miss Aboyne's breakfast table, and there was no trace of stern displeasure in the face of the fair hostess, as she poured out for him the promised basin of potent green tea.

"You were right enough, Milly!" said Vernon, after demolishing a huge fragment of Nora's sweet brown loaf—(for it is a truth to be noted, that lovers as well as heroes never forget to "appease the rage of hunger")—"You were right enough, Milly! Lady Octavia is not half so disagreeable as I expected to find her. In fact, she is really agree-

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able on the whole; certainly a lovely creature!—and she and Dr. Hartop were both exceedingly polite to me; but somehow I felt but half at ease. The Doctor's civility is so pompous, and now and then I could have fancied Lady Octavia too condescending. I wished myself here more than once in the course of the evening, but could not get away: for first the Doctor pinned me down to three games of backgammon"—"And then, I dare say, you had music, had you not?" asked Millicent. "Yes, Lady Octavia played all the time I was engaged with her uncle, and put me sadly out, by the by; for she plays so divinely, there was no attending to the game."—"So I suppose by this time you like the harp almost as well as the guitar?" said Miss Aboyne, with an arch glance at her companion.—"Not I, indeed!" replied Vernon, quickly, with a rather heightened colour; "though, to be sure, Lady Octavia was amazingly condescending—very considerate of the poor curate's ignorance and rusticity. She had been singing Italian while I was playing with her uncle—some of our favourite things, Milly;—but when the game was finished, and I approached the harp, her ladyship said, in the sweetest tone possible, 'I dare say you would rather have some English song, Mr. Vernon; perhaps I may find one or two among this unintelligible stuff,' and out she rummaged 'The Woodpecker'—my aversion, you know, Milly!" —Millicent, who knew Vernon's passionate taste for Italian music and poetry, (she herself, admirably taught by her father, had perfected him in the language,) could not help laughing at his evidently nettled recital of Lady Octavia's considerate kindness in lowering her performance to the supposed level of his comprehension; but perceiving, with a woman's quick perception in such matters, that even her innocent mirth was not contagious, (it is a nice affair to jest with wounded vanity,) she unaffectedly changed the subject, by drawing him into the garden, where she required his assistance in some trifling office about her hyacinths, and soon beguiled him again into smiles and good-humour; and at last engaged him to accompany her own sweet voice, and the old fine-toned guitar, in one of his favourite

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harmonies—not Italian, indeed, but a Scotch air of exquisite pathos, which had many a time before exorcised the foul fiend when its spell of fretfulness and despondency was cast over him.

Among the simple pleasures dear to Miss Aboyne, one of the greatest had ever been, from earliest womanhood, the quiet luxury of an evening walk; and now, in later life, that innocent pleasure had not only lost nothing of its pleasantness, but the charm of association, and the pensive joy of memory, cast a more hallowed tone over the hour of her favourite enjoyment. For many weeks, nay months, after her father's death, the impaired health of his sorrowing child incapacitated her from stirring beyond the narrow boundary of her own little garden; but of late, so much of health and strength had she regained, that, with the support of Vernon's arm, she had adventured to some distance from her home, and even beyond the village; and as the warm pleasant spring weather became more genial and confirmed, Millicent's fluctuating cheek became tinted with more permanent hues of health; and every evening she was able to extend her walk a little and a little farther, with her unfailing and attentive companion.

Those only who have languished under the pressure of a lingering enervating malady, more trying perhaps to the moral frame than many acute disorders, can conceive the exquisite enjoyment of feeling enabled, by gradually reviving strength, once more to wander out beyond some narrow limits, within which the feeble frame has long been captive, to breathe the fresh free air of meadow or common, or the perfume of green briery lanes, skirting the clover or the bean field, the still requisite support of some kind arm ever punctually ready at an accustomed hour to lead forth the grateful convalescent. How impatiently is that hour expected!—and should any thing occur to protract or mar the promised pleasure, how far more acutely felt is that privation than so trifling a disappointment should seem to warrant! Far heavier crosses may be borne with more equanimity, at less cost of reason and self-control.

So of late had Millicent longed for the hour of the even-

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ing walk—the hour when her capabilities of enjoyment, physical and intellectual, were ever keenest—when Vernon, released from his own peculiar duties and avocations, came, punctual almost to a moment, to be her companion for the remainder of the day, to afford her the support of his arm as far as her gradually returning strength enabled her to wander; and then, re-entering the cottage in tranquil happiness, to share with her the pure pleasures of reading, music, or sweeter converse, till her early hour of retiring. No wonder poor Millicent had fallen into the habit of longing for the return of evening! But now, for a season she must cease to do so. At least she must be content with uncertain, perhaps unfrequent and hurried visits from Vernon, after the late dinner at the rectory; and Miss Aboyne had too much good sense and delicacy not to feel, and even enforce upon Horace, the propriety and common courtesy of giving his society, for at least the greater part of most evenings, to the host at whose table he was a constant guest. And truly, in the perfect seclusion of Sea Vale, and the present deranged state of Dr. Hartop's health, which precluded him from inviting to the rectory any of those who might, perhaps, have charitably bartered a portion of their precious time for the reverend gentleman's exquisite *cuisine* and old *hochheimer*, (not to mention the attractions of his lovely niece,)—the ready-made society of the young curate—his qualifications of backgammon-playing—of listening deferentially to long prosing stories, when the Doctor was disposed to tell them, or, when the latter was slumberously inclined, of discreetly and noiselessly stealing away to the drawing-room and Lady Octavia's harp, thereby contributing, in the dearth of stronger stimuli, to keep the young lady in that flow of good humour so conducive to her uncle's comfort. These several qualifications, combined with the gentlemanly manners and unexceptionable character of Vernon, made his society too valuable at Sea Vale Rectory not to be monopolized there, with as much exacting selfishness as could be exercised consistently with Dr. Hartop's natural indolence and habitual good breeding. —Lady Octavia also conceived an *amiable* and immediate

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interest for the handsome, unsophisticated young curate, and forthwith set her fertile imagination to trace out the rough draft of a philanthropic plan for "making something of him," during the summer seclusion to which she had so dutifully devoted herself. No passion is so vulgar or so vulgarizing as an insatiate love of indiscriminate admiration. The high-born and high-bred Lady Octavia Falkland, habituated as she was to the refined incense of courtly circles, would have condescended to smile on her uncle's apothecary, rather than have wasted "her sweetness on the desert air." Vernon was comparatively an unexceptionable protegé, and her benevolent scheme in his favour was by no means "nipped i' th' bud," by the information communicated by Mrs. Jenkins, while assisting her lady to undress on the night of her arrival at Sea Vale Rectory, of his engagement with Miss Aboyne. "What a stupid affair that must be!" soliloquized the Lady Octavia; "and how charitable it will be to give 'the gentle shepherd,' really so tolerable a creature, some idea of *la belle passion* in its higher refinements—of the tastes and enjoyments of civilized society, before he is buried forever in a country parish, with a dowdy wife and a parcel of chubby cherubs. I suppose," observed her ladyship, more directly addressing herself to the confidential attendant—"I suppose this Miss—What d'ye call her?—is some rustic beauty, all lilies, and roses, and flaxen curls; for really Mr. Vernon is so good-looking, and so tolerable altogether, he would not have picked out a fright."

"Oh! they say she's very genteel, my lady!—(Miss Abine's her name, my lady!)—and used to be estimated rather handsome formerly, before she lost her father, and fell into ill health—and she's not so young as she has been."

"Why, Mr. Vernon can't be more than five or six and twenty, and it's impossible he can be in love with any thing as old as that, when there can be no *agrémens* to make amends for the want of youth."

"Oh! Mr. Vernon's seven-and-twenty, my lady! and Miss Abine's near three years older."

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"Three years older!—what, almost thirty?—You must be mistaken, Jenkins; Mr. Vernon could never have engaged himself so absurdly;—but it's an old affair, you said, didn't you, Jenkins? Quite a take-in then, no doubt; for I suppose she *has been* good-looking—and boys are so easily caught! It's amazing how artful some old spiders are!—There's Lady William Lorimer always contrives to hook in all the best men, somehow. But then she's married—that's one thing;" and so saying, the fair Octavia's head sank on her soft pillow, to dream of old spiders and young flies, the philanthropic pleasure of rescuing some fluttering innocent from the web of its wily destroyer, and the peculiar privileges and advantages of married ladies.

If Vernon's evening visits to the cottage became comparatively short and unfrequent after the arrival of the strangers, during the earlier part of their sojourn at the rectory, he generally made his appearance at Millicent's early breakfast table, and devoted to her as great a part of every morning as he could abstract from his parochial duties—duties from which she would have been the last to entice him; and once he had stolen away during Dr. Hartop's after-dinner nap—not to the rectory drawing-room and Lady Octavia, but to the cottage parlour and its gentle occupant, whose delighted and grateful surprise at sight of the unexpected visiter, made him first fully sensible of what she (the least selfish and exacting of human beings) had never even hinted—how lonely she had been in his absence; and he fancied, besides, that an appearance of more than usual languor was perceptible about her, though at sight of him a rich and beautiful glow suffused her before colourless cheek, and her sweet eyes glistened (not sparkled) with affectionate welcome, as she exclaimed, "Dear Horace! is it you?—How good you are to steal away to me! But could you do so without incivility?—what will they think at the rectory?"

"I don't care what they think, Milly!" replied Vernon quickly. "This is all very wrong—very hard upon us. Here you sit, left alone, evening after evening, deprived of exercise—of the quiet walks we so enjoyed together; and

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I am sure, though you said nothing, you have missed them very much. Why did you not take Nora's arm, and stroll out this fine evening, Milly?"

"Oh! I did not care to walk without you, dear Horace, and Nora is busy in her dairy at this hour, you know; and besides," she added with a cheerful smile, "I am very busy also, and shall get through a marvellous deal of work, now you are not here to make me idle." That evening, however, Millicent was but too happy to relinquish her notable employment for pleasant idleness, and sweet companionship, and the reviving freshness of the bright green fields. The lovers talked together of their approaching union, their unambitious hopes of quiet happiness, their plans of active usefulness and wise frugality to be patiently and firmly pursued, till the better times, still prospectively before them, should arrive, to recompense them for the cheerful endurance of temporary privations.

While they thus held sweet converse together, insensibly, as the evening shadows blended into twilight, assuming a more serious and tender tone, well befitting the discourse of friends who spoke of travelling together through time into eternity—while they thus held sweet converse, and Vernon listened to the low accents of Millicent's voice—so tender in its melodious inflections—so touching as it breathed forth, with tremulous earnestness, the inmost thoughts and feelings of her pure and pious heart,—he felt—felt deeply—the surpassing worth of the treasure committed to his care; and perhaps a vague, an almost indefinite, emotion of self-reproach, mingled with the tender impulse which caused him to press more affectionately close the arm which rested upon his, and to look round with moistened eyes on the calm sweet seriousness of that saintlike countenance, upraised to his with the innocent confidence of an angel's love. "After all," said Vernon to himself as he retraced his solitary way that night to the rectory—"after all, my own Millicent is as superior to that brilliant Lady Octavia, as is yon beautiful pale moon to the bright meteor which has just shot earthward." What inference may be drawn from this soliloquy as to the nature of foregone comparisons floating in

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Vernon's mind within the circle of Lady Octavia's fascinations, we leave to the judicious reader's opinion;—certain it is, that the last fervent conclusion was the genuine spontaneous effusion of sincere and affectionate conviction.

The next day was Sunday, and Vernon had promised to be at the cottage early enough to conduct Millicent to church, and to her own pew adjoining the rector's, before the general entrance of the congregation; for though he assured her that Dr. Hartop considered himself still too much a valetudinarian to encounter the fatigues of early rising and morning church, and that there was little chance, from what he had observed, of Lady Octavia's attending the first service, Millicent had a nervous dread of walking alone up the long aisle, subjected to the possible gaze of strangers, and gladly accepted the promise of Vernon's early escort.

But Fate and Lady Octavia had ordered otherwise. Contrary to Vernon's "foregone conclusion," and just as he was hastening away to the cottage, it was sweetly signified to him by Mrs. Jenkins, that her lady, who had hitherto taken breakfast about eleven in her own boudoir, would that morning have the pleasure of making tea for Mr. Vernon, from whom she should afterwards request the favour of conducting her to the rectory pew. The lady trode on the heels of her message. The breakfast room was thrown open, and she led the way into it with gracious smiles and winning courtesy, Vernon following in such a bewilderment of annoyance at being thus compelled to break his engagement with Millicent, and of admiration for Lady Octavia's blooming graces and captivating sweetness, that he quite forgot it would have been at least expedient to send a message to the cottage; and, strange as it may seem, by the time breakfast was half over, Vernon had actually ceased to think of any object in heaven or earth beyond the interior of the rectory parlour.

As Lady Octavia took his arm on proceeding towards the church, however, a thought darted across him of her who was at that very moment expecting the promised support of that very arm in affectionate security; and for a few minutes he was troubled and *distrait*, and made irrelevant an-

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swers to Lady Octavia's remarks and questions. Her ladyship had too much tact to notice the temporary abstraction; and, before they reached the thronged churchyard, Vernon's thoughts were again engrossed by the charms of his fascinating companion, and his besetting sin—his lurking vanity—was not a little excited by her flattering condescension, and the éclat of making so public an appearance with the high-born beauty familiarly leaning on his arm. It was not until he had conducted the fair stranger through the double file of gazers that lined the long central aisle up to the rector's pew, and left her there, properly accommodated with hassock and prayer-book, and till he had withdrawn to put on his surplice in the vestry—it was not till then that a thought of Millicent again recurred to him. But then it did recur, and so painfully, that even after he had ascended the pulpit, and was about to commence that sacred office which should have abstracted his mind from all worldly concerns, he found it impossible to restrain his wandering and troubled thoughts; and his heart smote him, when, glancing downwards on the assembled congregation, his eyes rested on the empty pew where poor Millicent should have been already seated, and that immediately adjoining, already occupied by the fair stranger whom he had conducted thither.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

It was the custom at Sea Vale Church to begin the first service with the morning hymn, not one verse of which was ever omitted by the zealous throats of the village choristers; and on this particular morning, those sweet singers of Israel, in concert—or rather out of concert—with bassoon and bass viol, had groaned, droned, and quavered through the first five verses, when the church-door fronting the pulpit, at the end of the long middle aisle, slowly opened, and two female forms appeared at it. One, the humble homely person of Nora Carthy, dropped aside into some obscure corner; and Miss Aboyne, who had been leaning on the arm of her faithful attendant, came slowly and timidly up the long aisle with ill-assured and faltering steps, her tall slender form bending under evident languor and weakness. She still wore the deepest and plainest mourning, and her face was almost entirely concealed by a large bonnet, and a long crape veil. On reaching the door of her own pew, her tremulous hand—even from that distance Vernon saw that it trembled—found some difficulty in unhasping it, and an old greyhaired man started forward from his bench in the aisle to render her that little service, in return for which she gently inclined her head, and in another moment had sunk on her knees in the furthest corner of the pew.

Vernon saw all this, too well recalling to mind poor Millicent's nervous anxiety to be quietly seated in church before the arrival of strangers; and he saw, besides, what he hoped had been unperceived by Miss Aboyne through her thick veil, that Lady Octavia had stood up in her pew to gaze on the late comer, as she slowly advanced up the church, and was still taking leisurely survey through an eye-glass of her kneeling figure. Vernon observed all this with acutely painful consciousness, and when the hymn was

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concluded, it was only by a powerful effort that he applied himself seriously to his solemn duty.

When next he glanced towards Miss Aboyne's pew, (while the first psalm was being sung,) her veil was flung back, and he observed with pleasure that her sweet countenance wore its wonted expression of perfect serenity, and that she was too intent on the sacred words in her hymn-book, and too much engrossed by the utterance of her tribute of prayer and praise, to be sensible that the brilliant eyes of her fair neighbour, still assisted by the raised eye-glass, were fixed in curious scrutiny of her person and features. In truth, Miss Aboyne had perfectly recovered the nervous trepidation which had distressed her on first entering the church; awful consciousness of the Creator's presence soon superseded all thought of the creature in her pious heart; and when at last her eyes caught an accidental glance of her fair neighbour, the only feeling that for a moment drew her earthward, was one of admiration for Lady Octavia's striking loveliness. In her entire abstraction from *self*, not even did the consciousness occur that she herself was the object of curious, and not polite—though it might be fashionable—examination.

Millicent had attributed to its true cause the non-performance of Vernon's promise to be early that morning at the cottage. She surmised that he might have been unexpectedly detained to accompany Lady Octavia to church; and well aware that he could not courteously have declined that office if proposed to him, she only regretted that, having been delayed by lingering expectation till the last possible moment, she should now have to encounter the redoubled ordeal of walking up the church alone, through the assembled congregation. Nora indeed—whose arm, in default of Vernon's, was put in requisition—the warm-hearted, quick-spirited Nora—was fain to mutter some tart reflection about "new comers," and "fine doings," and "no notion of it," as she accompanied her fair mistress to church; but the more candid Millicent only smiled at the jealous discomposure of her fond nurse, who shook her head incredulously at the assurance that Vernon would come

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and make his innocence clear, the moment he was at liberty to steal away for a few moments to the cottage. And such indeed was his full intention, when, on hastening back from unrobing after service, he found Lady Octavia awaiting his escort homewards, and that Miss Aboyne was already out of sight. When they had reached the rectory, Dr. Hartop was already seated at his luxurious luncheon—the midday dinner of modern times—and Vernon was pressed to partake before he mounted his horse for the church (some five miles from Sea Vale) at which he was to do afternoon duty.

Suddenly Lady Octavia was seized with a devout desire of attending that second service, and her phaeton was ordered to the door, and it was quickly arranged that she should drive Vernon to Eastwood Church, from which they were to return by a more circuitous, but very beautiful road, which her ladyship (as suddenly smitten with a passion for picturesque as well as holy things) expressed a vehement desire to explore. Dr. Hartop gave a reluctant assent to this arrangement, not from any prudential scruples respecting Lady Octavia's *tête-à-tête* with the handsome curate, as he felt comfortably assured her ladyship's views of an "establishment" were as remote as possible from the *beau-ideal* of a cottage and a blackberry pudding; but the honourable and reverend doctor rationally anticipated that the protracted drive might interfere with his regular dinner hour, and from this solid ground of objection it required all Lady Octavia's powers of coaxing and persuasion to win him over to unwilling concession.

The road from Sea Vale to Eastwood lay through the former village, close to Miss Aboyne's cottage at its outskirts. As they approached the little dwelling, Vernon sent onward an uneasy furtive glance, and felt annoyed and uncomfortable at the slow pace in which it seemed just then the pleasure of his fair conductress to indulge her beautiful bay ponies. He wished—yet wherefore was almost undefinable to himself—that Miss Aboyne might not be visible as they passed the cottage, and that they might pass it unobserved by her. But the wish, vague as it was, had

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scarcely arisen, when Lady Octavia, reining in her ponies to a walk, exclaimed—"What a sweet cottage!—a perfect cottage that, Mr. Vernon!—and there's the person who sat in the next pew to my uncle's at church this morning, looking so wretchedly forlorn and sickly, but really genteel for that sort of person, and must have been rather pretty when she was young, poor thing! Do you know who she is, Mr. Vernon?"—"A Miss Aboyne, daughter of a Colonel Aboyne, lately dead—a friend of mine," replied Vernon confusedly, and colouring, with a consciousness that he did so not tending to remove his embarrassment.

At that moment, Millicent, who was standing among her flower-beds, looked up at the sound of wheels, and their eyes encountered. A bright flush passed over her pale cheek, as she gave Vernon a half smile of recognition, and quietly resumed her occupation of tying up a tall lily, her face shaded by a large bonnet from further observation. Lady Octavia took another deliberate survey of Miss Aboyne through her eye-glass, and having so far satisfied her curiosity, continued, in a careless, half-absent manner —"Oh! a friend of yours, you said, Mr. Vernon?—this person's father—I beg your pardon though—she looks really very respectable, poor thing? quite interesting in that deep mourning. Of course, as you know her, she is not a low person—some Colonel's daughter though, you said, I think? and is he lately dead; and does she live all alone in that pretty cottage? How excessively romantic! and it does not signify for that sort of person, at her age, you know. I suppose she is very poor—some half-pay officer's daughter?" Vernon stammered something, not very intelligible, in reply to Lady Octavia's half question, half soliloquy; but her ladyship talked on, apparently heedless of his conscious embarrassed manner.

"Do you know, Mr. Vernon, that my maid is a half-pay officer's daughter—really a very superior sort of person is Jenkins. Why does not this Miss—I forget her name—go out in some such capacity? or as a governess?—you know, she might get into some family as governess."—Vernon's latent spirit and real affection for Millicent being somewhat

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roused by these annoying comments and interrogations, he was just about to speak more plainly, and would probably have silenced Lady Octavia's voluble malice, by the simple avowal of the relation in which he stood to Miss Aboyne, when her ladyship, who guessed the coming confession, which it was by no means her intention to draw forth, adroitly diverted her observations from Miss Aboyne to the surrounding scenery; and before they had well lost sight of Sea Vale, Vernon's spirited impulse had subsided, and he was again engrossed by Lady Octavia, and the gratification of being so graciously distinguished by the high-born beauty. But Lady Octavia's shafts had not glanced harmless; more than one point remained rankling in the mark; and with the next disengaged hour and thought of Millicent came hitherto unformed reflections in the lingering lot of poverty and obscurity to which they were possibly about to devote themselves, and an involuntary comparison between their ages for the first time occurred to him, in a light that made him wish the difference had been reversed, and that he could count those two years in advance of Millicent. But his better feelings caused him to check, almost as soon as conceived, thoughts that were now as ill-timed as ungenerous towards that gentle and confiding being, the most sincere and lowly-minded of all God's creatures, who had been long beforehand with him in regretting for his sake, her seniority of age, and had not shrunk from commenting on it to himself, with characteristic ingenuousness; for *she felt*, though he would not acknowledge it, that her prime was already past, while he had barely attained the full flush of maturity. But Millicent's self-depreciation was wholly untinctured with any jealous doubt of Vernon's true affection for her, and indifference to the more youthful attractions of other women; and as he passed the cottage with his beautiful companion, if a sudden and natural comparison presented itself between the blooming loveliness of the latter, and her own more humble pretensions, it was only accompanied by a wish—a woman's fond, weak wish—that, for his sake, she were younger, and fairer, and every way more

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deserving of the love, of which, however, she apprehended no diminution.

Dr. Hartop's fears were prophetic; the picturesque circuit home delayed the arrival of Lady Octavia and Vernon so long past the dinner hour, that the doctor's habitually urbane and placid temper would have been seriously discomposed, had he not that morning, in the course of a long visit from Mr. Henderson, the Sea Vale Æsculapius, acquired some information respecting the matrimonial engagements of his young curate, and the circumstances thereto relating, which, in the dearth of more interesting gossip, was not only acceptable to the worthy rector's craving appetite and accommodating taste, but would furnish him, *par les suites*, with a fair field for indulging his benevolent propensity and peculiar talent for giving gratuitous advice with patronizing condescension. Therefore he looked but tenderly reproachful at Lady Octavia, though the fins of the turbot were boiled to rags, and various other dishes, reduced to *consommés*, gave touching testimony of her cruel inconsideration; and scarcely had the servants left the dining room, when, giving three preliminary hems, and an inward chuckle, with which he was wont to preface his discourses in the pulpit and elsewhere, the honourable rector addressed his curate with a formal congratulation on his approaching marriage. Vernon's face crimsoned all over, as he bowed and stammered out a few words of awkward acknowledgment, stealing impulsively a furtive glance at Lady Octavia, who, affecting the most natural surprise in the world, artlessly exclaimed—"Married!—Mr. Vernon going to be married, uncle?—you don't say so? Oh, Mr. Vernon, how secret you have been!—and may we know to whom, uncle?" "To a most unexceptionable and every way respectable and amiable young person, as I have this morning had the pleasure of learning from a friend of yours, my dear Mr. Vernon!—from good Mr. Henderson, who tells me that Miss Aboyne"—— "Miss Aboyne!" interrupted Lady Octavia, with a pretty shriek of sudden dismay; "dear me! who could have thought it? I would not

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for the world have"—— "You know Miss Aboyne, then?" asked the doctor with some surprise, in his turn interrupting Lady Octavia. "Oh! I saw her to-day at church; and indeed she seems—she looks—that is, a—a *very* superior sort of person—I dare say very amiable, and excellent, and—You'll introduce me to Miss Aboyne, Mr. Vernon? I assure you I am dying to know her."

Vernon, now compelled to speak, made some awkward attempts to explain, that Miss Aboyne, from ill health and recent affliction, would not perhaps be able to avail herself of the honour of an introduction to Lady Octavia; and then the doctor, impatient of colloquial trifling, which delayed the pouring forth of his luminous and well-digested ideas, proceeded to favour Vernon, not only with his entire approbation of the projected union, but with an elaborate dissertation on domestic economy, by attending to the several branches whereof (which he condescended to dwell on more particularly) a country curate might maintain a wife and family, and bring up a score of children, with infinite comfort and propriety, on an income short of a hundred and fifty pounds per annum. "Of course, my dear Mr. Vernon!" the reverend gentleman went on to observe, "there can be no expensive luxuries, no idle superfluities, in such a modest and well-ordered establishment. But, after all, my dear sir! how little suffices for our *real* wants; and beyond those, what Christian character or philosophic mind would ——Octavia! do, pray, desire that the gardener may be written to about these pines; it is really scandalous!—they cost me a guinea a-piece, and this is the second I have cut to-day, and both uneatable. Send me the guava——But, as I was proceeding to observe—as I was going on to remark to you, Mr. Vernon—beyond our real necessities, (mere food and raiment,) what physical wants and temporal cares are worthy the consideration of a Christian and a philosopher? It hath been truly said—

> 'Man wants but little here below,
> Nor wants that little long.'

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And with regard to the article of food especially, I am persuaded, Mr. Vernon, and after long and mature deliberation on the subject, I feel no hesitation in declaring my entire conviction, that in no part of the united kingdom is the infant population more hale, healthful, and multitudinous, than where oatmeal or potatoes, with milk, or even pure water, forms its unvaried and unsophisticated aliment. Therefore, my dear sir, with regard to your future family, (those numerous olive branches with which it is my sincere prayer that Providence may surround your table,) I have no hesitation in strenuously advising"——

What the doctor proceeded to advise must remain for ever secret between himself and Vernon, whose feelings, during the present harangue, can only be compared to those of a person undergoing the "*peine forte et dure*," and who experienced proportionable relief when Lady Octavia, tired of continuing a silent *tiers*, arose to retire. As she passed him at the dining-room door, which he had hastened to hold open for her, she shook her fair head with a look of pretty anger, and archly putting up one taper forefinger to her rosy lip, said softly—"Oh, fie! fie! Mr. Vernon!—how treacherous you have been!" Vernon slowly and reluctantly returned to his mitigated penance; but far be it from us to review in detail the protracted torments of that mortal hour, during which the honourable and reverend gentleman, warmed with his own eloquence—charmed with his own theory—exalted with a sense of his own philanthropy, and with a consciousness of the lights which flowed in the faster as he continued to diffuse them—poured out his oracular suggestions with a condescending suavity that descended to the more minute particulars. At length, however, articulation thickened—sentences lagged at their termination—words came slower—syllables dropped away to indefinite sounds—and at last, in a final bewilderment of—"As I was saying, Mr. Vernon—I repeat, my dear sir!—that—that—I have no hesitation—in af-af-fir-r-r"—the comfortable double chin of the respectable adviser sank, embedded in its own rolls, on his ample chest,

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an incipient snore chimed in with the struggling affirmation, and after an attempt or two of guttural thickness, which sounded like "pease-porridge—cheap and wholesome," and "Mrs. Rundell," broke out into a grand continuous bass. Then, quietly and cautiously, Vernon rose from his seat of torture—quietly and cautiously he stole towards the door; but not so noiselessly did he effect his exit as to be wholly unnoticed by the half-conscious slumberer, whose drowsy attempts at articulation forthwith recommenced, but only to commission his curate, who thanked Heaven for his escape, with a message to the Lady Octavia. After the scene of his recent mortification, of which her ladyship had been a witness, Vernon would gladly, had he been permitted, have avoided an early *tête-à-tête* with her, and his heart told him he was anxiously expected elsewhere; but the doctor's message *must* be delivered—it need not delay him three minutes; and, with a determination that it *should* not, and hat in hand, he sprang upstairs, and into the drawing-room, from whence issued the sweet sounds of Lady Octavia's fine-toned harp and finer voice, deliciously blending in an aria of "Semiramide." Another voice, less powerful but more touching, accompanied by an humbler instrument, was breathing out at this self-same hour, in the orphan's home, such strains as well befitted the Sabbath vesper. Often did that low melodious voice pause in a cadence, or hang suspended on a note, while the singer's head was suddenly upraised in a listening attitude, her long slender fingers suspended over the silent chords, and her eyes glancing anxiously through the little casement towards the garden gate.

Again and again recurred that anxious pause; each time the hymn resumed with tones less firm, and a more plaintive modulation—at last a deep and heavy sigh was the involuntary prelude; and as Millicent withdrew her eyes from the window, tears, which had been long collecting within their lids, fell on her listless fingers as she bent over her instrument, and endeavoured to renew the sacred harmony. It was but an endeavour. Her voice had become weak and tremulous; so, discontinuing the vocal tribute, she wisely resorted to silent communion with that book which contains

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"words in season" for all the soul's necessities—of peace for the disquieted—of strength to the weak—of healing to the sorely stricken—of hope to the broken-hearted. Millicent found there the aid she sought; and when, as was her custom, she had joined with her old servant in their nightly sacrifice of prayer and praise, she was able again, and without effort, to smile cheerfully, and speak cheeringly to that faithful humble friend, the bursting indignation of whose affectionate zeal she endeavoured to repress, with a sincere assurance of her own conviction, that the morrow would bring with it a satisfactory explanation.

Early the next morning—earlier even than Miss Aboyne's primitive breakfast hour, Vernon entered the little parlour just as Nora was removing the tea equipage. She scarcely vouchsafed to notice his entrance even with a look, and the grave severity of her countenance by no means tended to dispel the troubled surprise with which he had remarked her employment. "Nora!" he hurriedly exclaimed—"what are you about?—where is Miss Aboyne?—Not ill? not ill, surely?—God forbid!"

"About as well as some folks wish her to be, I doubt," shortly and bitterly replied the indignant Nora, as she essayed, without further parley, or even honouring him with a second glance, to pass Vernon with the tea-tray. But his fears were now too thoroughly awakened to permit her silent egress; and, grasping her wrist more forcibly than he was aware of, he said—"Nora! Nora! tell me, for God's sake, is she really ill?—is my Millicent"——and his voice trembled with an excess of agitation that shook even Nora's predetermined inflexibility, and she so far relented as to inform him, (as, indeed she had been especially enjoined, in case he should call thus early,) that Miss Aboyne was suffering only from head-ach, but would be well enough to rise and receive him a little later in the day. She could not find in her heart, however, to give the supplement of Millicent's message; namely, that the head-ach was, she believed, but the effect of a slight cold which she had taken the preceding day. In lieu of that assurance, so affectionately

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intended to prevent self-reproach on the part of Vernon, the wrathful Nora, who had by no means any tender consideration for his feelings, took upon her to substitute an "amendment," imputing the head-ach to a sleepless night, and both the effect and its *immediate* cause to one far deeper, which she also vouched for on her own authority—the heart-ach; and then, giving way to the impulse of her warm and faithful spirit, the affectionate creature laid her hand on Vernon's shoulder, and while tears filled her eyes as she fixed them earnestly on his, exclaimed—"Oh, Mr. Vernon! Mr. Vernon! did I ever think it would have come to this!—that my child! my jewel! the flower of the world! Colonel Aboyne's daughter, should be slighted for that proud lady, who only came here to break my darling's heart, and help you to dig her grave, Mr. Vernon! Ay, there she'll be soon, sir; and then you may go your ways and be happy." With which comfortable and comforting assurance, Nora pushed by with her breakfast-tray, followed, however, by Vernon, who, though his worst fears were relieved by the first part of her communication, still went on to ask a hundred anxious questions, and commission the half-relenting nurse with as many tender messages, though the latter was too discerning and honest to feel or affect great reliance on his assurance, that he should satisfactorily account to Miss Aboyne for his apparent neglect of the preceding day.

The incredulous messenger conscientiously "told the tale as 'twas told to her," nevertheless, virtuously refraining from comment on "how the *truth* might be;" and Millicent's heart was prompt to accept beforehand the promised explanation.

During the watches of a sleepless night, it was impossible but that troubled thoughts and vague surmises had crept into her mind, involuntarily and unencouraged, nay, quickly and perseveringly repressed, with the generous confidence of a nature not prone to think evil; but still they returned like the phantoms of a feverish imagination, and Millicent was indeed sick in spirit, as well as physically indisposed, when Nora first drew her curtains that morning. But very soon the fresh air and the bright sunshine, entering at the

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unclosed lattice, brought with them sweet influences redolent of happier and more hopeful feelings; and when Nora soon after returned with her report of Vernon's early visit and affectionate messages, Millicent smiled with perfectly restored cheerfulness, inwardly rebuking the weakness which had subjected her to such causeless uneasiness. Neither was she disappointed that morning of the promised speedy return. Neither, on the part of Vernon, was any thing left unsaid to make his peace (had that been necessary) with one whose gentle bosom harboured no accusing spirit; and when he left her late and unwillingly—in truth it was always unwillingly that he *did leave* her—it was with a pledge to steal away to her again in time for one sweet hour of evening-walk, and *more* than one after-hour of social happiness in the dear little parlour, where so many a past evening had stolen away with the swift unsounding pace of unworldly innocent enjoyment. And punctual, as in former days, was Horace Vernon to the hour of tryst; and never, perhaps, *even* in former days, had his voice and looks, when addressing Millicent, expressed feelings so deep and tender. Those feelings were not excited by *reviving* attachment, for his *true* affection had never been alienated from their first object; but if *his heart* had not strayed from its allegiance, his lighter fancy might *have* been more susceptible of other fascinations; and a consciousness of this sort, and that he had for a time forgotten her who ever thought of him, perhaps it was, that imparted a shade of more than usual seriousness that evening to the expression of his large dark eyes, and of peculiar tenderness to his tone and manner. And for many succeeding days, even Nora's lynx-eyed jealousy detected no cause for dissatisfaction in any part of his conduct; and more than once Millicent hastened him from her side, where he was fain to linger, by reminding him of the lateness of the hour, and the courtesy due, on his part, to his entertainers at the rectory. Of the fair lady who presided there, Vernon made less and less mention in his discourse with Millicent; though even now and again a few words, a hasty remark, escaped him, that might have impressed an indifferent observer with a persua-

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sion that Lady Octavia's charms and opinions had, *at least*, their due weight with her uncle's handsome curate; and certainly the delightful *naiveté* with which she had betrayed her admiration of his fine person and interesting character, had by no means depreciated Vernon's estimation of her ladyship's refined taste and superior judgment. Lady Octavia had also performed, to the life, a few sallies of artless indiscretion and amiable enthusiasm, from which the gentleman was not very slow to infer, that she discerned in him intellectual as well as personal qualities of a higher order than even his affectionate Millicent gave him credit for. *She*, at least, had never administered that incense to his vanity which was so delicately, and of course *unconsciously*, offered by the Lady Octavia; still less had Miss Aboyne, in the humble simplicity of her heart, ever dreamt of *regretting* for Horace, that Fate (whose agency in human affairs she was not indeed wont to acknowledge) had marked out for him the obscure lot of a country clergyman. Millicent Aboyne could fancy no lot in life so peculiarly favoured. Lady Octavia Falkland had allowed Vernon to perceive that *for him*, capable as he was of—she never said exactly *what* —she considered it one of pitiable degradation. And there again, though Vernon's best feelings and more serious conviction sided with Millicent, the lurking weakness of his nature was grateful to Lady Octavia for her flattering prepossession.

"Millicent certainly loves me with true affection," once or twice soliloquized Vernon; "and yet how strange it is that she should have no ambition for me—that she should see me with less partial eyes than one to whom, comparatively speaking, I am nothing—at least"—and then broke in something very like a sigh—"to whom I can be nothing now; but Milly has seen so *little* of the world, and Lady Octavia so *much*, and has such extraordinary insight into character!—so much warmth of feeling!—so much heart!" Poor Millicent! wert thou cold and heartless?

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CHAPTER XXIV.

A FEW days after Doctor Hartop's memorable after-dinner communication, Lady Octavia signified to Vernon her intention of calling that morning at Sea Vale Cottage, which condescending attention on her part had been hitherto delayed by his report of Miss Aboyne's increased indisposition, and her inability to receive visits. That cause of exclusion having ceased to exist, however, he could no longer decline for Millicent the proffered courtesy. His own private reasons for wishing it could be altogether avoided, he did not perhaps analyse very curiously; or rather he assured himself, that solely for Millicent's sake, who would in truth gladly have dispensed with the visit, he was thus considerately reluctant.

But now Lady Octavia was predetermined; she would go that morning—she would go directly—and Mr. Vernon must escort and introduce her. And before he had well got through two or three not very neatly-turned sentences expressive of his sense of her ladyship's kindness, and so on, he found himself with his noble and lovely charge at the entrance of Millicent's little cottage. In another minute Nora (who, to Vernon's horror and dismay, presented herself with a brown coarse wrapper, tucked-up sleeves, and blue coddled arms evidently fresh from the suds) had thrown open the door of the small parlour where Millicent was sitting at work; and Vernon's ruffled feelings were not smoothed to complacency by his quick nervous glance at the nature of her occupation, which was that of dividing, and of folding with neat arrangement, certain lengths and squares of coarse dark household napery. Colouring and confusedly, without raising his eyes to the countenances of either of the fair ladies, he hurried through the ceremony of introduction; but the calm sweet tone of Millicent's

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voice encouraged him to look up, and then the natural grace and lady-like self-possession with which she received her beautiful visiter, relieved him in part from the uncomfortable feelings which Lady Octavia's courteous ease and amiable *prevenance* also contributing to dispel, he found himself in a few minutes conversing with his fair companions with tolerable composure. Still his restless eyes glanced ever and anon at the coarse unhemmed towels, and then at the direction of Lady Octavia's eyes—and from her to Millicent, and again from Millicent to the titled beauty. Beautiful indeed the latter was at all times, but strikingly so at that moment. Lady Octavia had too much good taste, and too much confidence in the unassisted effect of her own charms, ever to overload them with fashionable frippery. Her costume that morning was a plain white muslin robe, setting off to the best advantage the perfect symmetry of a figure, about which a large India shawl had been carelessly wrapped, and was now suffered to fall in picturesque drapery off one shoulder. A large straw hat, tied loosely with a broad green riband, also fell back as she seated herself, so as to leave nearly uncovered a bright profusion of auburn hair, beautifully disarranged by the fresh morning wind, which had also communicated a richer glow to the peach bloom of her young cheek, and a more sparkling vivacity to her laughing eyes. Vernon saw that Miss Aboyne's eyes were rivetted admiringly on her lovely guest. His, but the moment before, had been drawing an involuntary comparison between the youthful beauty and his own sweet Millicent; and if, on one hand, he was too forcibly struck with the contrast of the opening and the waning rose—of the sheltered blossom, and the storm-beat flower—he observed also, with affectionate pride, that the interesting and intellectual loveliness of Miss Aboyne, her simple dignity and natural elegance, lost nothing by the closest comparison with the brilliant graces and perfect finish of the Lady Octavia.

With what extraordinary celerity will thoughts, deductions, conclusions, and endless trains of ideas and images succeed each other on the magic lantern of the mind!

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Vernon's mental mirror still reflected a confused and misty portraiture; that of the Lady Octavia presented far more definite and well arranged conceptions.

On her way to the cottage, she had been weighing interiorly the comparative amusement to be derived from patronizing Miss Aboyne, or breaking her heart—but her judgment rather inclined from the scale of patronage. In London, or in a full and fashionable neighbourhood, it might have been played off *à merveille*, with high credit to the protecting power; but what could be done in that way at Sea Vale? It would be more in character with that sweet seclusion to get up the other entertainment, which, with good management, might be wrought into a very pretty romance of real life, and last out the whole term of exile, leaving the catastrophe to follow—for Lady Octavia's feelings were modelled much after the dramatic taste of our Gallic neighbours, which interdicts murder *on* the stage. "However," resolved the candid schemer, "I will see this Miss Aboyne before I make up my mind." And the brief test of a few minutes' intercourse with the unsuspecting Millicent, sufficed to settle her ladyship's plan of operations. She *felt*, almost at the first introduction, that Miss Aboyne *would not* be patronised—so set herself to work, with a clear conscience, on the other experiment.

"What a sweet cottage you live in, Miss Aboyne!" observed Lady Octavia, after a little desultory conversation, during which she had been taking a critical survey through her glass of the little parlour and all within it. "What a sweet cottage!" she exclaimed, rising to complete her examination—"So neat! and so small and pretty! Do you know, Mr. Vernon," turning to Horace, "I quite adore it—it puts me so in mind of dear Falkland;—it's so like our poultry-woman's cottage in the park!" Vernon coloured and fidgeted; but Millicent said, smilingly, that she was indeed partial to her little home, and gratified that its unpretending prettiness had excited a pleasing association in Lady Octavia's mind. "But do you really live here all alone, with only that old woman?" enquired her ladyship, with a sweet expression of condoling interest, just sufficing

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to make it doubtful whether her impertinence were intentional, or artlessly indiscreet. "How very odd!—that is, I mean, how very delightful!—and I dare say you have always something to do—some useful work or other so superior to fashionable, trifling occupations! Do, pray, go on with that you were about when we came in, my dear Miss Aboyne. I would not interrupt you for the world—and it would really amuse me; do go on—it's delightful to see people so clever and notable. I should like to learn;" and running to the table, Lady Octavia drew a chair close to it, and set herself to as grave and curious an inspection of the coarse manufacture Millicent had been employed in, as if each towel had been an ancient manuscript, and every stitch a hieroglyphic, or a Greek character. "Your ladyship will scarcely find any thing in my homely work worthy the condescending attention you are pleased to bestow on it," quietly remarked Miss Aboyne, in whose character want of penetration was by no means the concomitant of simplicity, and whose sense of the ludicrous was keen enough to have excited a laugh at the solemn absurdity of her fair visiter's caprice, if good manners had not restricted to a smile the outward indication of her feelings.

"Ah! now I know what this is—I remember all about it," triumphantly exclaimed Lady Octavia, looking up from the object of her examination, on which, however, one rosy palm remained emphatically outspread. "This is hackaback, or shackaback, or some such thing—the same sort of stuff mamma gives for pinafores to our school at Falkland. I wish I was half so clever and industrious as you are, Miss Aboyne, but I am afraid Mr. Vernon could tell you I am a sad trifling creature."

"Miss Aboyne's general avocations differ less from your ladyship's than those she has selected for this morning's amusement," said Vernon, with an ill-concealed irritability that tingled to his very finger-ends; and, nervously starting from his chair, he went towards Millicent's music-stand, and partly to prove his petulant assertion, as well as to withdraw Lady Octavia's attention from the hated work-table, he requested her to look over some manuscript Italian

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music which he hurriedly extracted from the pile. His request drew forth an exclamation of surprise from her ladyship, as, approaching the music-stand, and taking the offered sheet, she cried, "Italian!—you sing Italian, then, Miss Aboyne? I suppose Mr. Vernon has been your teacher?" Millicent looked towards Horace with arch meaning in her eyes; but taking the reply to himself, and speaking with generous warmth, and a countenance glowing with grateful acknowledgment, he said—"No, indeed!—your ladyship does me too much honour; I am indebted to Miss Aboyne, and to one who was equally beloved and respected by her and by myself, for all my knowledge of Italian—for every acquisition I most value—for more than I ever can repay." There was a general pause. Lady Octavia wished she could have retracted a question which had excited feelings of a very different nature from those she designed to insinuate, and had drawn from Vernon so spirited an avowal of them. But the slight inadvertence led, at least, to one satisfactory conclusion.

Vernon's honourable warmth and affectionate allusion to her beloved father, touched the spring of deepest emotion in Millicent's bosom, and subverted in a moment the outwork of calm self-possession, which had maintained itself so successfully, and in truth so easily, against the oblique aim of Lady Octavia's puny missiles; and the deep flush that now mantled her before-colourless cheek, and the tears that swam in her dove-like eyes, were evidence unquestionable that Miss Aboyne *had a heart*, and one not altogether organized of "impenetrable stuff."

To do Lady Octavia Falkland justice, however, she did not meditate actual *murder*, on or off the stage, or any thing indeed but a little harmless temporary sport with the happiness of the two persons so long and solemnly contracted. She merely designed to assert the omnipotence of her own charms, by convincing Miss Aboyne that she had it in her power to make Vernon faithless to his early vows; and, with regard to Vernon himself, she only intended to give him a clear insight of the disadvantages which must attend his union with Miss Aboyne, and a despairing glimpse of

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the superlative felicity in store for the fortunate mortal who should awaken an interest in her own fair bosom. With guarded caution, also, she charitably inclined to indulge him with an experimental taste of *la belle passion*, such as it *might be* between sympathetic souls of a superior order; and then, having so far generously enlightened him as to the capabilities of his own heart, to leave him and his betrothed to complete their stupid union in their own dull way, and be "as happy as possible ever afterwards."

Millicent did not again see Vernon till late in the morning which succeeded that of Lady Octavia's visit; but she received him then with looks that beamed a welcome even more affectionate than that with which they were ever wont to greet him. His warm tribute to her dear father's memory, so spontaneously uttered the preceding day, in reply to Lady Octavia's uncivil observation, had been balm to her heart, and her grateful feelings were ready to overflow at his appearance. But he approached and greeted her with an unusual degree of coldness and constraint, and there was a cloud upon his brow, and an abstractedness in his manner, that quickly and effectually repressed the expression of a sensibility too tender and profound not to be keenly susceptible of the slightest repulse.

For some time few words passed between them. Vernon seated himself beside Millicent at the table where she was finishing some pencil sketches, and usefully employed himself in cutting up her pencils into shavings, and her Indian-rubber into minute fractions. At last—"Milly," said he, abruptly, "what can induce you to waste your time about such abominable work as you were employed in when Lady Octavia called yesterday?—and to have it all spread out in your sitting-room, too!—such vile, hideous litter!"

"My dear Horace!" mildly replied Millicent, looking up from her sketch with an expression of surprise, not unmingled with a more painful feeling—"my dear Horace! do you forget that, circumstanced as we are, my time is much more wasted in such an occupation as this, than it was in the homely task you found me engaged in yesterday? You know, Horace," she added, half-smiling, as she

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bent again over her drawing, "that Nora and I are very busy now providing for our future household comforts? But I will allow, such work as mine was yesterday, is not ornamental to a sitting-room; you shall not find the little parlour so disgraced again, dear Horace."

The sweetness of the answer was irresistible; but though it made Vernon heartily ashamed of the weakness which laid him open to such paltry annoyance as that he had just made cause of complaint to Millicent, it could not immediately tranquillize his irritable mood, or charm him into forgetfulness of those tormenting thoughts and comparisons Lady Octavia had been too successful in exciting. Yet was he so sensible of their unworthiness, that he hated himself for the involuntary and unsuspected treason; and his heart smote him more sharply when, a few minutes afterwards, Millicent spoke of Lady Octavia's beauty with such unaffected admiration, as testified, had such proof been wanting, how incapable was the genuine humility and nobleness of her nature of envious self-comparison with the youthful loveliness of another. "I never saw such hair as Lady Octavia's!—such beautiful hair!" she observed, proceeding with her drawing and her eulogium.

"But *I have*, Milly, and much *more* beautiful," asserted Vernon, edging his chair nearer to hers; and in a twinkling, before her enquiring look had met the tender meaning in his eyes, he had dexterously removed her close mourning-cap, and plucked out the comb that fastened up a profusion of the finest hair in the world, black and glossy as the raven's wing, which, thus released from confinement, fell in redundant masses over her neck and shoulders, waving downward almost to the ground as she sat, and, half shrouding her face and figure in its cloud-like beauty, invested with somewhat of celestial character the touching loveliness of a complexion pure and transparent, and almost colourless as alabaster, and eyes of the dark violet's own hue, ("the dim brooding violets of the dell,") now upraised to Vernon with an expression of innocent surprise and *not* offended feeling.

"What a sin it is to hide such hair as this, Milly!" con-

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tinued her lover, lifting aside one of its heavy tresses from her now smiling and blushing face, on which he gazed with a sudden and almost surprised conviction that his own Millicent was a thousand times lovelier than Lady Octavia; and the evidently admiring fondness with which his looks were fixed upon her, did not lessen the suffusion of her cheek, though it quickly brought tears into her modest eyes, as they fell bashfully under their long black lashes. There is no such cosmetic as happiness—no such beautifier as the consciousness of pleasing, where we wish to please; and never was woman's heart indifferent to the gratification of being even *personally* pleasing to the object of her affections, whatever some superior-minded disagreeables may pretend to the contrary. Of late, some half-defined idea had possessed itself (she scarce knew how) of Millicent's humble heart, that though she was still dear to Horace, not only for her own sake, but for her father's, and the remembrance of "auld lang-syne," she had no longer any personal attractions for him; and she HAD FELT the contrast between herself and Lady Octavia, though, in her simple integrity, drawing from it no conclusion more painful or uneasy than that Horace *must* feel it also. But that sudden action—those few words—and, more than all, that look of his, conveyed blissful assurance that she was still beloved as in days gone by—still beheld with eyes as fondly partial. Vernon was quite right. His own Millicent was, at that moment a thousand times more beautiful than the youthful and brilliant Lady Octavia.

It would extend this little history far beyond its prescribed limits, to continue a minute detail of those progressive circumstances which more immediately influenced the happiness and interests of Horace and Millicent during the remainder of Dr. Hartop and Lady Octavia's sojourn at Sea Vale. The leading incidents must suffice to keep unbroken the thread of the narration. Miss Aboyne failed not (however disinclined) to return Lady Octavia Falkland's visit within a few days after that honour had been conferred on her; neither did Lady Octavia fail, during their *tête-à-tête* in her luxurious boudoir, to call Millicent's attention to

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sundry objects, affording indubitable proof—in the shape of copied music, verses, and sketches for albums, &c., &c.,—that the whole of those long mornings, during which she saw little, and occasionally nothing, of Horace, were not devoted to the serious duties which she had been fain to persuade herself occupied at least the greater part of them. Had any lingering doubt still clung about her heart, Lady Octavia's considerate assurance (as the visiter rose to retire) was intended to remove it effectually. "I assure you I am quite shocked, Miss Aboyne," she said, with the sweetest deprecating manner in the world, "at monopolizing so much of Mr. Vernon's time; but he is so kind and obliging! —and then, you know, those men are such lounging creatures of habit; when he is once comfortably established on *that ottoman*," pointing to one at the foot of her harp, "there's no driving him away, though I often tell him"—— With what arguments her ladyship so conscientiously essayed to "*drive*" Vernon to his duty, Miss Aboyne gave her no time to explain: for even Millicent's gentle spirit was moved by the obvious malice and intentional impertinence of the insinuation; and rather haughtily interrupted Lady Octavia with an assurance, that she arrogated to herself no right whatever over Mr. Vernon's disposal of his time, which must be well employed in her ladyship's service, she made her farewell curtsy, and returned to her own solitary home. Lady Octavia's eye followed her to the door, with an expression that said, "So—'let the stricken deer go weep';" and that shrewd meaning implied something very near the truth. The arrow had struck home.

From that morning, Miss Aboyne considered herself absolved from the duty of returning any other of Lady Octavia's visits—who, on her part, becoming sensible that they did not co-operate as she had expected, with her amiable purpose, soon discontinued them altogether. But the worthy doctor, desirous of testifying, in the most flattering manner, his gracious approbation of Vernon's choice, made a magnanimous effort to honour the object of it, by paying his personal respects to her at her own dwelling, it is more than probable, with the benevolent intention of bestowing on her

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a few of those valuable hints on domestic economy, and the rearing up of a large family, with which, at all convenient seasons, he was wont to favour his fortunate and grateful curate. But adverse circumstances diverted from Millicent the good fortune intended for her, the anticipation of which (for Horace had prepared her for the visit) had in truth grievously disquieted her. Carefully enveloped in a warm roquelaure, (for though the noonday sun was scorching, the morning had been showery,) escorted by Mr. Vernon on one side, and his own valet, with a *parapluie*, on the other, the doctor (having previously fortified himself with a basin of vermicelli soup) was wheeled in his Bath chair through the village of Sea Vale to Miss Aboyne's cottage—or, more properly speaking, to the garden gate leading to the little dwelling, for there his further progress was arrested by an unforeseen and insurmountable obstacle. The humble gateway was not wide enough, by at least a foot, to admit the doctor's equipage; (it would scarcely have afforded ingress to his own portly person;) and the little gravel walk still flooded by recent showers, was impassable to the rheumatic gouty feet that trode "delicately" even on Brussels carpets. Moreover, on casting his eyes despairingly towards the cottage door, at which stood Miss Aboyne, (who, on perceiving the dilemma of her honourable and reverend visiter, had come forward thus courteously,) he conceived a well-founded suspicion, that even arrived at that inner portal, he should fail in effecting an entrance; wherefore like a true philosopher, accommodating himself to circumstances, he gave two or three prelusive *hems*, with a view of complimenting the future bride, (even from that inconvenient distance,) with the speech he had conned in readiness. Already, to Vernon's horror and Millicent's dismay, he had begun, "My dear Madam! it is with infinite satisfaction that I do myself the honour"——when a heavy cloud, which, unobserved by the pre-occupied divine, had been gathering over head, began to discharge its liquid stores so suddenly, that the faithful valet, who waited not his master's commands to face about, gave the necessary word to the officiating foot-

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man; and the Bath chair, with its reverend contents, under shelter of the *parapluie*, was safely wheeled into the rectory hall, before Millicent had well recovered her alarm in the uninvaded sanctuary of her little parlour.

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CHAPTER XXV.

Two months and more than half a third had passed away, since that May morning (almost the latest of the month), a few days prior to the strangers' arrival at the rectory, when Vernon had won from Millicent her unreluctant promise to be indissolubly united with him that day three months. What changes had taken place since then—not in the fortunes and apparent prospects of the affianced pair, but in their feelings, habits, and relative circumstances! Vernon had gradually absented himself more and more from the cottage; for some time excusing himself to Millicent, and to his own heart, on various pretences, which, however, he felt would not bear the test of investigation. By little and little he discontinued even those poor unsatisfactory apologies—and Millicent was best content that it should be so; for even her blindness (the wilful blindness of affection) was dispelled at last, and she felt within herself, and knew to a certainty in her own heart, that she should never be the wife of Horace Vernon. Yet she did not, for one single moment, suspect the sincerity of his intentions; nor doubt that, when the illusion was dispersed (she knew it to be an illusion) which now warped him from his *better self*, he would return to *himself* and to her, with bitter self-upbraiding, and passionate avowals of his own culpable weakness, and honourable anxiety to fulfil his engagements with her. Nay, she doubted not that she was still dear to him—she *scarcely* doubted that the best affections of his heart were still hers, however appearances might have led to a different conclusion—but she *more than* doubted whether Horace Vernon and Millicent Aboyne could ever be again as they had been to each other, therefore she felt in her heart that it was better they should not be united. Yet, for all this, there was no change in her manner to Vernon—scarcely

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any perceptible change—only, perhaps, in lieu of the sweet, familiar cheerfulness with which she had been wont to carry herself towards him, there was a shade of deeper seriousness, of more affecting tenderness, in her deportment, such as might have betokened, to a curious eye and a keen observer, something of those feelings with which the heart of one bound in secret on some far journey, may be supposed, on the eve of departure, to yearn towards a beloved friend, still unsuspicious of the approaching separation.

Millicent's generous confidence in Vernon's honour (in his *honourable intentions* at least) was not misplaced. Never for a moment had he harboured a thought of violating his engagements with her; and his heart, as she had been fain to believe, still turned to her as towards its real home at every lucid interval (the term is not inappropriate) of his spell-bound infatuation; and on more than one late occasion, when some accidental circumstance, or thought suggested by his good angel, had aroused his slumbering conscience and better feelings, he had almost deceived the poor Millicent into reviving hope and trust by an overflowing tenderness of manner more apparently impassioned than in the early days of their youthful attachment. In some such mood of mind he took his way towards the cottage about the period last mentioned, a fortnight before the first of September, the day he and Millicent had long anticipated as that which was to unite them indissolubly. For some time past, however, it had been mutually understood, rather than arranged, between them, that their marriage should not take place till after the departure of the strangers, whose stay at the rectory was not likely to be prolonged beyond the first week in September. That period now drew near—and Vernon remembered that it did, with a strange mixture of discordant feelings. He felt like one who has been long living, as in a dream, under the influence of some strange illusion, which was about to break away and leave him to the sober realities of his appointed lot. That morning, one of those trivial occurrences which often lead to important results in human affairs, tended very materially to hasten the dispersion of his airy visions. He

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had been present—for the time forgotten—when the letter-bag was brought in to Doctor Hartop, who delivered out from its contents one from Falkland Park to Lady Octavia; it was from one of her sisters, and the matter so interesting, so redolent of present pleasures, and fêtes in preparation, of noble and fashionable guests arrived and expected, (fashionable men more especially, some of whom were alluded to in slang terms of familiarity, sanctioned by the modern *maniére d'être* of *high*-bred rather than *well*-bred young ladies,) that the fair reader for once gave way to the fulness of her heart, (seldom was her ladyship guilty of such vulgar unreserve,) and poured out its feelings into the somewhat unsympathizing ear of her reverend uncle, reading to him, as she proceeded with her letter, detached portions of Lady Jane's tantalizing communications, which so stimulated her impatient longings, that she ended with, "And now you are so well, dear uncle, why need we stay a minute longer at this horrid place? I could not survive another month of it."

What might have been the doctor's reply to this very energetic appeal was known only to the fair appellant; for Vernon, taking advantage of the open door, and being entirely overlooked, had slipped quietly away; and with Lady Octavia's words still tingling in his ears, was in two minutes on his way to the cottage, and to Millicent. In a strange tumult of feeling he bent his steps thither—of surprise and mortification, and bitter self-humiliation, and reproach; other thoughts by degrees stole in, like oil upon the troubled waves—thoughts still composed of mingled elements, painful and humbling, yet healing withal—of Millicent and all she had been to him—faithful, patient, and uncomplaining, where there had been so great cause to excite an accusing spirit—nobly unsuspicious of wrong—incapable of envy—inaccessible to mean jealousy, though not insensible—Oh no: he felt she was not!—of neglect, which, to look back upon, wrung him to the soul: and still, still, ill as he deserved it of her, his own—his loving Millicent—his better angel—his future wife—and well should the devotion of all his life to come strive to compensate for his temporary dere-

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liction! Then came across him a shuddering recollection of the increased languor and feebleness, which, on two or three late occasions, he had observed and spoken of to herself; but she had made light of his question, and he had not dared to have recourse to Nora. Nora and he had, indeed, by tacit consent, for some time avoided speaking to each other; and if they chanced to encounter, Vernon had hurried past, without raising his eyes to a face where he would have been sure to read searching accusation.

All these thoughts were busy in his heart as he pursued his way to the cottage, and—for they had melted him to a tenderness of which he wished to subdue the outward indication—by the longest road—that which ran along the back of the village street and the cottage garden—the very lane where, close by the honeysuckle arbour, in that very garden, he had been arrested the first evening of his arrival at Sea Vale, by the sweet sounds of Millicent's voice, mingled with the manly tones of her father's. And there again Vernon's heart smote him; his parting promise to his departing friend!—how had it been fulfilled? "But it is *not* too late, thank God!" he exclaimed aloud; and starting onward, he quickened his step towards the orphan's dwelling, as if to hasten the ratification of his vows, and take her to his heart then and for ever. But, at the turning of the green lane, he was overtaken by his old medical friend Mr. Henderson, who, without slackening the pace of his ambling pony, merely said in passing—"Good-morrow, Mr. Vernon! You are on your way to the cottage, I see; you will find Miss Aboyne better to-day."

"Better! has Miss Aboyne been ill? Pray, sir! Mr. Henderson!"—and Vernon starting forward, caught the pony's bridle-rein in the eagerness of his alarm.

The good apothecary looked at him with grave surprise, as he answered, with some severity of tone, "Is it possible *you* can be ignorant of the very precarious state of Miss Aboyne's health, Mr. Vernon! But seeing her, as of course you do, daily, you may not have been struck with the great personal change which has been for some time perceptible to me." Alas! many days had passed of late

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during which Vernon had found no leisure hour for Millicent, and this was now the third day since he had seen her. How the fact, as if he were then first aware of it, struck home to his conscience!—and with what miserable apprehension he questioned and cross-questioned the apothecary! and drew from him an explicit avowal, that although he did not consider Miss Aboyne's case by any means hopeless, it was so critical that her life hung as it were by a single thread, of which the slightest agitation, the most trifling imprudence, or any untoward circumstance, might dissever the frail tenure. "And to be free with you, Mr. Vernon," the old man continued, laying his hand on Vernon's shoulder, as he spoke with glistening eyes and a more unsteady voice —for he had known Millicent from her childhood, and felt for her an almost paternal interest, which had not been diminished by certain lately-held conferences with the indignant Nora, whose tale, however exaggerated, tallied but too well with his own preconceived suspicions—"to be free with you, I will add, that I fear, I greatly fear, Miss Aboyne's *present* malady proceeds as much from moral as physical causes, and that you will do well to shield her, with the most watchful tenderness, from every disquietude it may be in your power to avert. That gentle spirit of hers, and that tender frame, were not made to 'bide all blasts,' Mr. Vernon. Take care of her; she is well worth keeping;" and so saying, the old man extricated the rein from Vernon's hold, by quickly spurring on his pony, and was soon beyond the reach of further questioning, leaving the questioner still rooted to the spot, with food enough for bitter reflection to keep him there—*how* long he knew not—before he recovered himself sufficiently to enter the cottage.

The porch door stood open, as did that of the little parlour; but the room was empty. Millicent had been recently there, however; for her handkerchief lay on the table beside a portfolio and some loose sheets of music. Throwing himself into the chair she had occupied, Vernon sat for some moments, his eyes fixed with unconscious gaze on the objects before him, till, half rousing himself from that abstraction, he began listlessly to turn them over, and at last

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his attention was arrested by a half-torn sheet that lay apart, with Millicent's handkerchief. The paper was wet. More than one drop—from what source he too well divined—had recently fallen on the words of a song which he well remembered having formerly given to Millicent, with a laughing injunction to make herself perfect in the old ditty against her day should come. The words ran thus—a quaint "auld-warld" conceit.

"Unhappy lady! lay aside
Thy myrtle crown, thy robes of pride;
A cypress stole befits thee now,
A willow garland for thy brow.

For thou art changed, and changed is he
Who pledged thee love's first fealty;
A lover's pledge! a lover's vow!
And where is he? and what art thou?

At younger beauty's feet, with sighs
And silken oaths, thy false love lies:
A thing forsaken—that thou art,
With faded form, and broken heart.

And now, poor heart! be wise, and crave
Of earth no guerdon but a grave—
And hark! 'ding! dong!' that timely bell
(*Their* wedding peal) shall ring thy knell.

And lay thee by the church-path side,
When forth he leads his bonny bride;
And then, perhaps, he'll cry 'Adieu,
My fond first love!—so passing true!'"

Other drops had mingled with those yet glistening on the lines of that old song, before Vernon (still holding the paper) let fall his arms upon the table, and bowing down his head, concealed his face within them. He had continued thus for some time, and, so deep was his abstraction,

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that he was perfectly unconscious of an approaching footstep, or that he was no longer alone, till a soft hand touched his, and looking up, he met the dewy eyes of his wronged Millicent fixed upon him with an expression of angelic pity. That look set wide at once the flood-gates of his before almost uncontrollable emotion, and starting up, he caught her to his bosom with a passionate suddenness, that, accompanied by half-intelligible words of love and self-reproach, almost overpowered her gentle and timid spirit. But soon recovering from the momentary agitation, she mildly soothed him to composure; and said, half smiling, as she softly drew the old song from his unconscious hand—"Dear Horace! I never doubted your heart—I never feared desertion." "Bless you for that! Millicent, my beloved! my only love!—but can you—can you forgive?" "That you have sometimes forgotten me of late, Horace?" "No, not forgotten—not forgotten, as Heaven shall judge me, Millicent!—but—I have been bewildered—infatuated—mad—I know not what; and yet my heart was here; nay, nay, look not incredulous, Milly!—here—and here only, as I hope for—and did you not say you never doubted *that*?—Repeat it, my beloved!—tell me again you never doubted me, my generous, noble-minded love!" "I never doubted your affection for me, Horace!" repeated Millicent, with tender seriousness;—"but now, my dear friend! sit down beside me, and let us both be calm and talk together quietly and unreservedly, as it befits friends to"——"Friends! no more than friends, Milly? is it come to that?" vehemently exclaimed Horace, with a reproachful look. "And what name more sacred, more endearing?" she rejoined, in tones less faltering than before—"Friends here, and hereafter, and forever, in that better place where, sooner or later, whatever is reserved for us here, I trust we shall meet again, and be as the angels in heaven"——"And here—here, Millicent! are we to be *no more* than friends—Have you forgotten, that within two little weeks you would have been my wife, if those fatal strangers!—but they will be gone before three weeks are over, and then"——"and then, dear Horace! it will be time enough to talk of—of"—our mar-

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riage day, she would have added, but her voice suddenly failed, and with a quivering lip she turned her face away from him, till the momentary weakness was overcome.

It was soon mastered; and then, once more raising to his her not unmoistened eyes, she continued, "I have been wishing, earnestly wishing, for such an opportunity—such an opening as this, dear Horace!—to pour out my whole heart to you—to reconcile you to your own, in case of an event, for which, I fear, I think, you may be entirely unprepared, and which I know you would feel too painfully, if now, while we have time, we did not exchange mutual confidence and forgiveness for any wrongs fancied or——"

But she was passionately interrupted—

"Now!—while we have time!—an event for which I am unprepared!—Millicent! Millicent! what mean you?—But I deserve this torture!"—and grasping both her hands in his with convulsive violence, he gazed in her face with such a look of fearful enquiry as wellnigh unnerved the poor Millicent, and rendered her incapable of reply.

But, making a strong effort for composure, she spoke again—at first only a few soothing and affectionate words, to still the agitation that excited her tenderest compassion; and then, impressed with the seriousness and solemnity of the task she had imposed upon herself, she went on, with quiet firmness, to tell him of what had been so long upon her heart, though till that moment she had not found courage to impart it to him—*time* or *opportunity*, she might have said—but that would have sounded accusingly, and Millicent lived only to bless and to console.

"My dear Horace," she continued, "hear me patiently—hear me calmly—for my sake do so. For some time past I have felt a conviction that I should not live to be your wife;—nay, nay, start not so fearfully at these words—look not so shocked, so self-accusing, Horace!—But for you—but for your care and kindness, I should long ago have followed my dear father. But you kept me here; and I thought that it was God's will that I should live, and become the companion of your life. That thought was very sweet to me, dear Horace!—too sweet, perhaps, for it made life too

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dear to me. But since—of late, as I have told you, I have had reason to believe that such was not God's pleasure—Nay, let me—let me speak on now, Horace! now that I am strengthened for the trial!—and do not, do not think, dearest!—for I interpret that look—that he has stricken me by the hand I loved. I was not made for duration, Horace!—You know my mother died early of consumption—I was not well before my father's death; and that great shock!—so sudden—and——"

"And *I* have done the rest!—I, wretch that I am!—Tell me so, Milly!—tell me so at once, rather than stab me with such mockery of comfort;" and, no longer able to restrain himself, even for her sake, he started from her side, and paced the room in agitation, that she wisely suffered to subside before she attempted to resume her affecting subject. "But it is not too late, Millicent!—angel!—thou wilt yet be spared, that I may repay with life-long tenderness thy matchless excellence;" and then, melted to softer feelings, he flung himself beside her, and, clasping her to him, gave way to a passion of womanish tears.

When both had in some measure recovered composure, Vernon was the first to speak again, though in an agitated whisper:—"Tell me, my beloved! Oh, tell me, you will try to live for my sake!—I know, I see how blind I have been—how madly blind to your increased indisposition. Fool! idiot! that I was! I heard of it, for the first time, this morning, from Mr. Henderson; but he told me—he said—indeed, indeed, Milly! our good friend thinks, that, with care and watchfulness, all will go well again. And such care!—such watchfulness as I shall take now!—Oh God! Oh God!"

And now their tears mingled; for Millicent's rolled fast down her pale cheeks, and it was many minutes before she again found utterance, and that her secret prayer for strength was answered, and she was able to speak to him words of peace and comfort.

"I know—I know," she faltered out at last, "that I may yet recover, if such be God's pleasure, my Horace! for in His hands are life and death. But, my beloved! if you

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would endeavour to reconcile yourself to a contrary event, I should be well content to go, for methinks the bitterness of death is past; and—do not call it unkind, Horace!—I doubt whether I could ever again, under any circumstances, be so happy in this world as I have been. I feel as if the capabilities of earthly happiness and usefulness were dead within me—as if I had already left my youth and prime of days at an immeasurable distance; and such a companion would ill suit you, Horace! would ill assort with your buoyant spirit, and unsubdued energies. But God's will be done! He will order all as is best for us; and if I live, and you continue to wish I should become your wife——"

"If I continue to wish it!—Oh, Millicent!"

"Then, then, dear Horace!—I would only say—May God bless our union!—but if it is *not* to be, I do not tell you to remember me; I know you will do that; but I would bid you, for my sake, torture not your own heart with self-upbraiding. Assign all—the ordering of all—as indeed is only fitting, to the will of Providence;—and—and if my poor Nora should be unjust or unreasonable in her grief, bear with her, dear Horace; and be kind to her still, for my sake. This little dwelling!—I have taken some order about it, and her. The long-expected living will be yours at last;—and then I have so arranged it—you will not disapprove it, Horace?—that this cottage may be let or sold, and so furnish a provision for my faithful Nora. Forgive me, that I pain you thus, dear friend!—and yet, a few words more. Oh! my dear Horace! be watchful of yourself. We have all much need to pray against the deceitfulness of our own hearts. The world and its ways would cheat you, Horace! for I know your heart. Oh! I have longed thus to pour out the fulness of mine—my whole spirit, if it might be—in one appeal to yours:"—And, elevated by the solemnity of that appeal, and by the fervour of her enthusiasm, Millicent's voice became full and firm, though its tones were deep as if sent up from the bosom's inmost sanctuary, and her countenance was irradiated by more than earthly beauty, as, clasping her pale thin hands to-

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gether, she looked up in Vernon's face, and slowly articulated, "Above all, my father's friend! mine own dear friend! so run the race that is yet before you, that, though mine is first finished, we may meet at last in the land where there shall be no more separation." The awful pathos of that affecting prayer, though it thrilled through the heart of Vernon, subdued his impatient spirit and agitated nerves to solemn stillness. He attempted no audible answer—words would have been powerless to express his feelings; but Millicent felt and understood all the assurance she desired to receive, in the tears that moistened her clasped hands, as, taking them between his, he bent his face upon them in the long and profound silence that succeeded to his violent emotion.

Horace Vernon laid his head that night upon the pillow by many degrees "a sadder and a wiser man" than he had arisen from it in the morning. But sleep came not to his eyelids, nor rest to his spirit, till utter exhaustion procured him, towards morning, a short interval of troubled slumber.

Lady Octavia was not long in perceiving the decline, or rather cessation, of her influence over Vernon. But attributing his defection to resentment at the unguarded sentence which had escaped her in his presence on the perusal of Lady Jane's letter, she only read in it the indication of a more profound passion than she had yet felt certain of having inspired him with. But after a few days of condescending sweetness, fruitlessly expended in manœuvres to lure back the startled quarry, she began to suspect that, whatever was the cause of Vernon's *brusque* retreat from her boudoir, and of his subsequent *réfroidissement*, he was now detained from her by a return to his first allegiance, of which her ladyship had by no means calculated the possibility, while the light of her attractions still blazed in competition with the pale star of Millicent.

Piqued at this discovery, Lady Octavia's heart was forthwith vehemently set on what would otherwise (in the near prospect of departure from Sea Vale) have been a matter of comparative indifference to her—the recovery

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of her former ascendency; and, nothing daunted by first failures, she worked at her purpose with all the energies of those great co-operating powers—woman's will and woman's wit, supported by woman's perseverance. But even those combined forces had wellnigh experienced signal defeat, so entirely had Vernon's revived affection and reawakened fears for Millicent, and his bitterly compunctious feelings, engrossed every faculty of his soul since that notable morning when the trifling incident of Lady Octavia's momentary incaution had been so influential in arousing him from his long illusion. Influential as it had been, however, in the first instance, by sending him forth in that mood of mortified and bitter feeling, which, rather than any worthier cause, had impelled his first hasty steps towards the long-deserted cottage, the better thoughts that, in his way thither, had gradually superseded his previous irritation—his short but startling conference with the good apothecary—and last, and above all, that affecting interview with Millicent, had so effaced all recollection of the paltry annoyance which had originally disturbed him, that it was first called to his recollection by the almost deprecating tenderness of Lady Octavia's voice and looks, when she found an opportunity of addressing him unobserved; and that was not very speedily obtained, for, except at the dinner hour, and some short portion of the after evening conceded to Dr. Hartop's claims, Horace scarcely absented himself from the cottage for many days, after that which had so effectually aroused him from his long and culpable infatuation. Before the little casement of Millicent's chamber was unclosed, he was looking up towards it as he paced the walk beneath with nervous impatience; and even his conscience-struck reluctance to confront Nora, was overcome by his anxiety to obtain from her the first and most exact report of her gentle mistress. A painful surprise awaited Vernon the first morning he was thus early at the cottage. Long after the little casement above had been partly opened, and he had seen Nora pass and repass before it, as if preparing to assist Millicent at her toilet, he had awaited for some time in the garden—in the dear old ar-

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bour, and lastly, in the sitting-room, in expectation of Miss Aboyne coming down to breakfast. But finding at length that there were not even any symptoms of preparations for the morning meal, he was driven to enquire the reason of such unusual delay, and then learned, with a pang that wrung him to the heart's core, (for Nora spared not to speak home,) that, for some time past, Millicent had been too much enfeebled to rise at her accustomed hour, and now habitually took her breakfast in bed. The emotion with which Vernon listened to this startling corroboration of his fears, still trembled in the tone of his voice as he hurriedly remarked—"Why Nora! surely it was not so long ago, that when I breakfasted here last——"

"Oh, no! Mr. Horace; not so long, to be sure," interrupted the faithful servant, with a look that spoke, and was meant to speak, keenest reproach; "not more than a fortnight maybe, or perhaps three weeks—no time at all—only people may be dead and buried, and forgotten too, you know, Mr. Horace, in less than that. The last time you were to have breakfasted here, you were so thoughtful as to tell Miss Aboyne over-night that you would come next morning; so the dear child would rise and make me dress her to be ready for you—she was too ill then to dress herself, poor heart!—though I told her it was ill spending her precious life upon one that little deserved it of her."—"Little, indeed!" groaned Horace, as he turned abruptly from Nora and the cottage, to breakfast where and with what appetite he might.

But Horace Vernon's versatile feelings and unstable nature—characteristics often leading to results as fatal as those consequent on the indulgence of violent and evil passions, were as easily elated as depressed—and, in truth, his mind was not so constituted as to be long capable of enduring or retaining a deeply painful impression. By degrees he deluded himself into the belief that he had been too seriously alarmed, though not too soon awakened. And indeed his now tenderly unremitting watchfulness of the drooping Millicent was soon rewarded by such a reviving brightness of spirit in her, as in a manner reflected itself

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outwardly on the fair and fragile frame which at all times sympathized but too faithfully with the fine essence it enshrined. It is true, Millicent herself replied only by a grateful smile, or an evasive word—not always uttered with a steady voice—to Vernon's fond entreaties that she would acknowledge herself to be regaining strength—that she would bless him with some assurance that might confirm his sanguine hopes. But Mr. Henderson's manner and replies were more decidedly encouraging. Even Nora began to look less coldly, and by degrees more cheerfully, when he encountered her in his frequent visits; and at last, one evening as he was leaving the cottage, she not only vouchsafed to resume her old office of opening the garden gate for him, but said, in a half cordial tone, as he was passing—"Good-night, Mr. Horace! Keep a good heart, and all may end well yet."

"Bless you! thank you! thank you! dear, dear, sweet, lovely Nora!" was Vernon's rapturous exclamation, as dashing back the closing gate, so as almost to upset his old friend, he hugged her round the neck with such schoolboy vehemence of delight, as left her wellnigh breathless and half indignant, though not quite unaccustomed in former days to such ebullitions of his volatile spirits.

Her rebuke (if she uttered one) was, however, quite lost on the offender. Before she had time to set her cap straight, or smooth down her ruffled neck-kerchief, he was already half way to the rectory, which he re-entered that night in a frame of mind so overflowing with happiness, security, self-reconcilement, and universal benevolence, as reflected its own hues on all surrounding objects, animate and inanimate. Dr. Hartop was agreeable—Lady Octavia enchanting—all but her charms and obligingness forgotten or forgiven—(what was any woman's heart to him but Millicent's?)—her harp and voice in exquisite tone—his own vocal powers and his flute in the happiest unison with both; Dr. Hartop gradually sank to balmy slumbers; music was discontinued in consideration for his repose; conversation succeeded—"the feast of reason and the flow of soul"—of course restricted on the doctor's account, to the low key

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and subdued tones that sound so sweetly confidential: and when, on his awakening, bed-candles were lighted, and Lady Octavia, taking hers from Vernon, and gracefully paying her parting salutation to Dr. Hartop and himself, withdrew to her own apartment, she just turned her head on entering it to glance down the passage, at the end of which Vernon was still unconsciously holding open the drawing-room door, as he gazed after her receding form, and softly said to herself, with a quiet inward laugh, a curled lip, and an eye of infinite meaning, "Ah, ah! je te rattrappe, fine mouche! Sauve toi si tu pourras."

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CHAPTER XXVI.

The rector's departure from Sea Vale was at length fixed for the second week of September; but when the final arrangements were made, Lady Octavia found herself condemned to accompany her uncle during his month's residence at Exeter, instead of immediately joining the gay autumn party at Falkland Court. A short time back, such a *contretems* would have severely tried her ladyship's philosophy, but within the last fortnight Vernon's premature return to his old colours had piqued her into a determination, *coute qui coute*, to bring him back to hers, if but for a week, before she gave him his final discharge; and a scheme was now shaping itself in her creative imagination, which promised, not only to effect that purpose in the most satisfactory manner, but to wile away some of the horrors of her stay at Exeter—horrors infinitely greater, in her estimation, than those of rural retirement; and she hailed as quite providential certain waking visions, which substituted the handsome curate and his flute, moonlight music and moonlight walks with him, in old bay windows and echoing cloisters, for chimeras dire of portly canons and their dignified spouses—solemn dinners—silent whist-tables, and all the dull ceremonial of an ecclesiastical court circle.

During the last fortnight of Dr. Hartop's stay at the rectory, the family party had been augmented by the arrival of a brother of Lady Octavia's, the Reverend Arthur Falkland, who came down to Sea Vale for the united advantages of shooting and sea-bathing, and Millicent readily accepted Vernon's apology for stealing from her a few of those hours that he would more willingly have devoted entirely to her, in order to show due attention and courtesy to his rector's guest and nephew. No day passed, however, without his visiting the cottage—few during which he did not look in

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more than once or twice on its lonely mistress; and if his visits were each time shorter, and his manner more unequal and pre-occupied, she assured herself that, circumstanced as he then was, nothing could be more natural or excusable. "And it will only be for a few days longer, Milly," said he. "Thank God! only three days longer; for this is Saturday, and on Monday they depart—and then, dearest, dearest Millicent! we shall be once more all the world to each other." Tears came into Vernon's eyes as he uttered the last words; and after a short pause, during which he had been gazing upon Millicent with troubled yet tender earnestness, he vehemently added, "Would to God they were already gone! would to God I had never seen them, Milly!" —And his painful agitation distressed the affectionate heart of Millicent, who endeavoured to soothe him with every tender and comforting assurance, best calculated to reconcile him to himself, and allay what she conceived to be the sudden storm of compunctious retrospection.

That evening, whether in the fond weakness of her heart, yearning to give comfort, or that she really began to entertain hopes of prolonged life, (still dear—how dear to her if to be passed with Vernon!) for the first time since her danger had been made known to him, she spoke of the future—of an earthly future; looked at him almost believingly when he talked of their union; and did not shake her head, nor smile as she *had* smiled of late, when he talked of it as an event that was now assuredly to take place before the close of that autumn already entered upon. Once or twice indeed, she seemed to shrink, as if from hope; but it was evident, at least it seemed evident to Vernon, that she did not turn from it as formerly; and as with him there was no medium between despair and joyful certainty, he hailed her doubtful encouragement as a pledge of perfect security, which would justify him for having acceded to a plan which he had hitherto hesitated from communicating to Millicent, though he had entered the cottage that morning with the express purpose. Now, however, there was no reasonable cause to deter him from speaking. All was so safe—Millicent so well, and in such good spirits!—so, without further

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deliberation, he said smilingly, but with somewhat of a hurried tone, and a forced gaiety of manner,—

"Milly! do you know I must have one long braid of that smooth raven hair, (which is so becomingly arranged, now you have humoured me by leaving off that dowdy cap,) by way of talisman, to bind me to you during four—five days—it may be a whole week, of separation."

Millicent started, and the hectic of a moment suffused her pale face; but she only looked her surprise, and Vernon went on to explain, rather confusedly, while he was profitably busied in unrolling her ball of sewing thread, that Dr. Hartop had given him such a pressing invitation to accompany him and Lady Octavia to Exeter, and be their guest during the musical festival which was to take place the week ensuing, that he felt it would have been not only ungracious, but ungrateful, to decline the courteous proposal;—"and so, dearest Millicent," he continued, looking up from the handiwork on which his eyes had been fixed with intense interest during the first part of his communication, "I have promised to go,—that is, with a mental reservation that you continue well enough for me to leave you without anxiety for those few days, and that you will not feel uncomfortable at my doing so."

While Vernon was speaking, Millicent had time to recover from the painful emotion into which she had been surprised by his unexpected information; and inwardly rebuking herself for its unreasonable selfishness, she said promptly and cheerfully,

"You did quite right, dear Horace. I am so well that I can spare you safely, and shall enjoy with you, in imagination, the musical treat that will be to you such a real banquet. On Monday, you said—the day after to-morrow—and to stay till——?"

"Only till the Saturday ensuing—I intend—I believe," replied Horace to her look of anxious enquiry. "At *furthest*, the *Monday* after; and in that case Falkland, who stays on some weeks at Sea Vale, would take my duty."

"But you will not stay away longer—not much longer?" hesitatingly, yet almost imploringly, rejoined Millicent, in

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a lower and less cheerful tone, a sudden shade slightly clouding the serenity of her mild countenance. "I am very nervous still, and may not long continue so well as I am now; and then, if any change should take place. Nay, do not look so disturbed, dear Horace—I am so well now! —but do not stay away *too long*."

"I will not go—I will not go, Milly! if it gives you one moment's pain, dear girl!—But how is this, Milly? a minute agone, and you spoke so cheerfully and hopefully. And now—that quivering lip!—those glistening eyes!—Millicent! my beloved! what means such sudden change?"

"Forgive me, dear Horace! I am ashamed of my waywardness—of my caprice," she faltered out, concealing her face, now bathed in tears, against Vernon's shoulder—"But it is the infirmity of my enervating malady—the effect of weakness—of unstrung nerves; and sometimes an unbidden thought suddenly crosses and subdues me, and I cannot restrain these foolish tears. But they always do me good, Horace; and after the shower comes sunshine, you know," and she looked up at him, as she spoke the last word, with still dewy eyes and a faintly brightening smile, that beautifully illustrated her simple metaphor. But the humid ray scarcely broke out into cloudless sunshine, though she recovered perfect serenity, and would not listen for a moment to Vernon's reiterated, but rather fainter proposition, of wholly relinquishing his intended excursion.

"Remember," said he, as they stood together in the cottage porch, just before he left her that evening—"Remember, Milly, I am to take away with me one of those ebon locks. If it is not ready for me to-morrow, I shall cut it off myself. I wish I had your picture, Milly!"

"I wish you had, dear Horace," she quickly answered; "I have often wished it lately—I should like you to have it; but there is my father's, *that* will be yours, Horace; and it is so like me, you know, you will never look upon it without thinking of me."

"Without thinking of you, Milly? Shall I not have *yourself*, your own dear living self, as well as that precious picture we shall so often look upon together?"

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"But, dearest Horace, if it should be otherwise, if that picture *only* should become yours, place it somewhere where you may see it often when you are *alone* and in your quiet hours of serious thought. But do not look so very serious *now*—I spoke but of an '*if*,' a passing thought. To-morrow I shall send you away cheerfully."

"If you do not, Milly, here I remain, be sure. A word would keep me—only half a word. Speak it, beloved! I almost wish you would." But she spoke not, and, bidding her an affectionate farewell for the night, he was turning to depart, but lingered yet a moment to point out to her a small white rose-bud, which promised yet to blossom in its sheltered corner. "Look, Milly," he said, "'The last rose of summer.' Your favourite rose will yield you yet one blossom. Before it is full blown, I will be here to pluck and place it in your bosom." Words lightly spoken sometimes sink deeply into loving hearts, especially under circumstances such as Millicent's, where physical causes acted morbidly upon a mental system, by nature sensitive, and perhaps not wholly free from a taint of superstitious weakness. From that hour the rose became her calendar, and she watched its unfolding leaves, as if their perfect expansion was to be the crisis of her fate.

By what means, or under what pretences, Lady Octavia had succeeded in obtaining for Vernon an invitation to accompany Dr. Hartop and herself to Exeter, matters little to the reader of this story. The success of her ladyship's manœuvres has been sufficiently illustrated by the preceding conversation. The day that intervened before that of his departure being Sunday, Vernon was detained from the cottage during a great portion of it by his clerical duties. Then his assistance was required at the rectory in packing up certain portfolios, albums, and various nicknackeries, not to be safely entrusted even to the invaluable Jenkins, so that, although he contrived to look in two or three times upon Millicent, each visit was but for a few hurried minutes, the last briefest of all. And well for her that it was so; for though she had successfully struggled through the day to maintain a semblance of cheerful composure, and had indeed partly

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reasoned herself out of what she meekly accounted unreasonable disquietude, as evening drew on, the mental excitement subsided, her spirits seemed to ebb away with the departing daylight, and she felt as if they would hardly hold out "to speed the parting friend" with that cheerful farewell with which she had promised to dismiss him. Vernon also had his reasons for brief leave-taking; but his adieus, though fondly affectionate, were more than cheerful, hurried over with a voluble gaiety, and an exuberance of spirits that seemed hardly natural. "Till Saturday, dearest!" were his parting words; and before Millicent's long-restrained feelings had broken out into one choking sob, before the brimming tears had forced their way over her aching eyelids, he was out of sight and out of hearing, though the garden gate still vibrated with the swing which had closed it behind him. And the lock of raven hair, which was to be his "talisman," which Millicent had not neglected to make ready as he had enjoined her, though with womanly coyness (womanly feeling rather) she had hesitated to give it unclaimed. He was gone, and had forgotten to claim it!

The middle of the third week, from the day of Vernon's farewell to Millicent, found him still at Exeter. Shall we tell how the time crept at Sea Vale in his absence? or how it had flown with him in that world of novelty to which he found himself transported? or shall we count over, link by link, "the chain of untoward circumstances" (so he wrote of them to Millicent) which had caused him to prolong his absence from her so long beyond the term he had pledged himself to at parting? Alas! it is but too easy to picture to one's self the feelings of the lonely invalid—the first sharp pang of disappointment—the sickness of hope deferred—the sinking of the spirit into utter hopelessness. And it would be tedious and distasteful to enumerate all the frivolous excuses alleged by Vernon for his continuance at Exeter, excuses which, for a time, however, were more indulgently admitted by the generous, unsuspicious Millicent, than satisfactory to his heart, and slumbering, though not seared, conscience. Yet he had partly succeeded in stilling, though not stunning the inward accuser. "Milli-

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cent's first letter had been cheerfully and cheeringly written. She was undoubtedly well—so well, that in a few days, more or less—" But it was easier to drive away reflection altogether, than, by resorting to it, to acquire perfect self-justification—so he fled from himself and his own thoughts to the syren, in whose charmed presence all but his own captivations were forgotten.

Lady Octavia's attractions had not, however, achieved, unaided, the triumph over Vernon's best resolves—it might well be said over his best principles; and still their power had extended over his imagination only, leaving his heart true to its first affection, if *true* that preference may be called which, when put to the test, will sacrifice no selfish gratification, no unworthy vanity to the peace and welfare of its ostensible object. Every thing combined with her ladyship's witchery to complete Vernon's mental intoxication. A whirl of dissipation, consequent on the provincial gathering for the Musical Festival, of which Lady Octavia condescended to be the presiding deity, no other high-born or fashionable beauty being at hand to dispute her pre-eminence; the marked favour with which he was publicly distinguished by this goddess—the admired of all eyes, the envy of many—and the general notice and consideration it obtained for him, and the still more dangerous influence of her seductive sweetness and varied powers of charming, in those frequent *tête-à-têtes* which she had anticipated with so much sagacious prescience "in antique bay windows and shadowy cloisters;" the perpetual excitement of music, or dancing, of novelty, where all was new to him:—every thing conspired, together with Lady Octavia's arts and the weak points of Vernon's character, to complete that intoxication which was at its height about the time (the third week of his stay at Exeter,) when, in pursuance of our task as a faithful chronicler, we must resume a more circumstantial detail, though still as briefly as may be, of his further progress.

In the miscellaneous assemblage drawn together by the music meeting, Lady Octavia's discriminating survey had found in the male part of it no individual so qualified to do

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credit to her taste and patronage as the handsome, and interesting, and really elegant Vernon; and so interesting did he become, in the daily increasing intimacy of familiar intercourse; so rapidly developed under her ladyship's fostering encouragement, were his latent capabilities for "better things," as she was pleased to express herself; and to such advantage did he appear among all surrounding competitors, that had the fair Octavia been of those with whom

"Un peu d'amour, un peu de soin
Mene souvent le cœur bien loin,"

there is no saying how far beyond its original design "*le roman d'un jour*" might have extended. But her ladyship's heart, not composed in the first instance of very sensitive atoms, had been laid to harden so effectually in the petrifying spring of fashionable education, as to have become proof to

"Cupid's best arrow, with the golden head,"

if not shot from the vantage ground of a broad parchment field, cabalistically endorsed with the word "settlement;" and having achieved her vowed triumph, by "fooling Vernon to the top of his bent," she began to suspect the pastime had been sufficiently prolonged, and that if the delirium she had worked up to a crisis were not timely checked, she might find herself publicly committed, in a way that would not only militate against her own *serious* views, but probably come to the knowledge of Dr. Hartop, and incur his severe displeasure.

Lady Octavia was far too well-bred to give the cut direct to any body, and too "good-hearted" to inflict more than unavoidable mortification on a person, for whom, as she expressed herself to the confidential Jenkins, she should always retain a compassionate interest. But while she was meditating how to

"Whistle him *softly* down the wind,"

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Fate stepped in to her assistance in the shape of an old acquaintance, who very unexpectedly made his appearance at Exeter with a party of friends, with whom he was on a shooting excursion.

Lord George Amersham was one of those persons, who, without being very young, very handsome, very clever, at all wealthy, or in any way "a *marrying* man," had, by some necromancy, so established his supremacy in all matters of taste and ton, that his notice was distinction, and his favour fame. No wonder that suffrage so important was *brìguée* by all female aspirants for fashionable ascendency; and Lady Octavia had been so fortunate as to obtain it on her first coming out. The appearance of such a star in the provincial hemisphere, to which she was condemned *pro tempore*, would at all times have been hailed by the lovely exile as an especial mercy, but "under existing circumstances," (to use the diplomatic phrase,) she esteemed it quite providential, as nothing now could be so easy and so natural as the transfer of her attention from Vernon to her old acquaintance.

The former was soon made sensible of the change, though at first more surprised and perplexed at it, than aware of the systematic alteration of Lady Octavia's deportment. But his obtuse perceptions were soon to be sufficiently enlightened. A subscription ball, which was to take place on the second night of Lord George's stay at Exeter, was also to be honoured by the presence and patronage of Lady Octavia Falkland and her party, including the noble sportsman and his friends—Vernon as a matter of course—Dr. Hartop as a matter of necessity—and, as one of convenience, a deaf and purblind old lady, the relict of a deceased canon, who made herself useful in a twofold capacity—ostensibly as Lady Octavia's chaperon, and veritably as an unwearied sitter-out of (she could not be called a listener to) Dr. Hartop's long stories, and an established member of his select whist set. This party had dined at the rectory, and Lord George's rank having of course entitled him to conduct Lady Octavia to the eating-room, and take his seat beside her, it was equally a matter of course, (the other

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guests being also men of pretensions, if not of rank,) that the bottom of the table and the deaf old lady, who had been duly marshalled out by the doctor, should fall to the lot of Vernon, whose proximity to the door, however, secured him the office of holding it open for the ladies when they should pass to the drawing-room. But just at that moment, Lady Octavia, actuated perhaps by some compunctious consciousness that her attentions had been too entirely engrossed during dinner by her neighbours at the upper end of the table, was seized by a fit of such extraordinary cordiality towards the canon's deaf relict, that she passed her fair arm with affectionate familiarity within that of the worthy old lady, and began whispering something in the lappets of her cap, which lasted till they reached the stair-foot, and the dining-room door had closed behind them. Lord George and two of the other gentlemen accompanied Dr. Hartop and the ladies to the ball-room, in the Doctor and Mrs. Buzby's carriages. The third walked thither with Vernon, and when they entered the Assembly-room, Lady Octavia was already dancing with one of Lord George's friends. When her partner, after the set was over, had conducted her to a seat, Vernon drew near, with the hope (expectation it would have been a few nights previous) of engaging her for the next quadrille. But she was still engrossed by her partner, and the others of Lord George's party, he having comfortably established himself on the best half of the sofa, of which she occupied a corner, entrenched behind two of the gentlemen who were conversing with her, so that Vernon could only proffer his request, by speaking it across Lord George, so audibly as to make him colour at the sound of his own voice, with a painful consciousness of awkward embarrassment, which was not diminished by perceiving that his words were wasted "on the desert air," at least that they had only drawn on him a grave stare from Lord George, and the eyes of many surrounding loungers, though the Lady Octavia's were perversely fixed in an opposite direction, and she appeared perfectly unconscious not only of his address, but of his vicinity. Just then a space was cleared for waltzing—the magic sounds set twenty pairs of te-totums in ro-

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tatory motion, and Lord George, who "never danced," languidly, and, with apparent effort, roused himself from his recumbent posture, and, to the no small amazement of Vernon's unsophisticated mind, without addressing a word to Lady Octavia, or further ascertaining her consent, than by passing one arm round her slender waist as she arose from the sofa, whirled her off, seemingly "nothing loath" into the giddy circle. Vernon was suddenly sensible of a vehement longing to breathe the fresh air, and contemplate the beautiful moonshine. We cannot exactly pronounce how long he indulged in solitary meditation: but when he re-entered the ball-room, the waltz was over—an after set of quadrilles just finished, and the dancers were crowding about the refreshment tables.

Vernon mechanically mingled with the throng, and in a few minutes found himself very undesignedly posted behind Lady Octavia and Lord George, who was supplying her with ice and sherbet, and finishing some speech of "infinite humour," at which her ladyship was laughing as heartily as it was admissible that lips polite should laugh. "Now really, my lord! you are too severe," murmured those lovely lips between the spoonfuls of ice. "You are too hard upon my pastor fido—an excellent obliging creature, I assure you—really quite civilized, and has been infinitely useful to me in that horrid desert. No such 'Cymon' either, as you call him; and as for Iphigenia—the fair Octavia will not confess having charitably enacted that character—her delight is to do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame."

"But seriously though—this pastoral pet of yours—this Mr.—— by the by, what a vastly appropriate name!—this Mister Verdant—"

"How can you be so excessively absurd!" uttered the lady, convulsed with inward laughter at his lordship's wit—"you know his name's Vernon; I call him 'Le Beau Lindor.'"

"Le Beau Lindor" had heard quite enough. Backing with such inconsiderate suddenness, as almost to upset good Mrs. Buzby and a dignitary of the church, in his *brusque* retreat—he left the ball-room—cleared the stairs

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at a bound—and by a progress almost as rapid, gained Dr. Hartop's residence, and the sanctuary of his own chamber. What were his meditations after he had shut himself within it, securing himself by turning the key from possible intrusion, we cannot nicely determine, but may fairly infer they were not of a very philosophic nature, from certain sounds of heavy and irregular footsteps—portentous thumps and bangs, indicating the violent derangement of furniture, the opening and shutting of draws, with no gentle and deliberate hand, and the dragging backwards and forwards of a portmanteau; which disturbance was so audible in the hall below, as to excite the wonder and curiosity of the "liveried loungers," one of whom at last tapped at the visiter's door, with a civil request, to know if Mr. Vernon wanted any thing, or had rung his bell. "Nothing," was the short and comprehensive reply, in a tone which interdicted further intrusion; but all became quiet within the chamber, and by the time the footman had rejoined his fellows of the buttery, its solitary occupant was seated in perfect stillness—a packed portmanteau on the floor beside him—his elbows propped on the table before which he sat, and his face concealed by his two hands, upon the outspread palms of which rested his hot and throbbing temples. "Millicent! Millicent!" were the first sounds that after a spell of profound silence struggled through his scarcely unclosed lips, and half-shut teeth. But it seemed as if his own utterance of that gentle name stung him to agony; for, starting back from the table, he flung out his arm across it with so much violence as to dash off two or three books that had been piled together and now came to the floor with a noisy fall, which apparently aggravated Vernon's irritable mood, for he spurned the volumes with a kick that sent them sprawling in all directions, but left on the spot where they had fallen a letter which, in the general dispersion, escaped from its hiding-place within one of their covers. That letter caught Vernon's eye, and in a moment he was fixed, still, motionless, almost unbreathing as a statue, gazing on that small white square of folded paper, as if a serpent lay coiled before him. And there was cause—full

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cause and weighty—for that shrinking, yet fascinated gaze. That letter was from Sea Vale—from Millicent. Five days before it had been placed in Vernon's hand, and the seal was yet unbroken! It had been brought to his chamber door, just as he had caught up his hat and gloves, to attend Lady Octavia, who was waiting for him in the hall, on a pic-nic excursion to some picturesque spot in the vicinity of Exeter. He held the letter for half a minute —his hand was on the seal, and yet he felt at that moment that he would rather defer the perusal of its contents. An impatient summons came from a silvery voice below—Vernon started—gave one look to the direction—one kiss to the well-known characters, and slipt the unopened letter within the covers of a book that lay on the table, to be flown to, to be read in undisturbed quietness, the moment of his retnrn. Five days ago that letter had been so deposited. There it had remained till the present moment, untouched, unread, unremembered! And Vernon—how had he passed that interval? What were his feelings, when suddenly before him lay the mute accuser? "Madman that I have been!" he groaned aloud, and sinking into a chair, his tears fell fast on the unnerved fingers, that could with difficulty break opon the seal, which had been too long inviolate. Millicent's letter, which enclosed another, ran thus:

"My dear Horace,

"You desired me to open any letters which might arrive for you while you were absent. I have done so by the enclosed, which I forward to you immediately; for, as you will see, it is one that concerns you nearly—that calls you to take possession of the long-promised living. I thank God, my dear Horace, that I have lived to congratulate you on this event; and I pray God to make it blessed to you; and to bless you in your faithful service here, and in the reward of it hereafter. But this is not my only reason for pressing your return —your *immediate* return to Sea Vale, even—(was I ever before so selfishly exacting, Horace?)—even should inclination, or any cause short of necessity detain you at Exeter. You will soon again be at liberty to return thither, or to

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seek the society of your *other* friends, wherever they may be. There will be time enough for *them*—for all—but not for me, dear Horace. Therefore, for your own sake more than mine, come,—come soon, come *very* soon, or (for I know the kindliness of your nature) you will afterwards reproach yourself with a bitterness, the sting of which I shall not be permitted to extract, nor to soothe the only pain I shall ever have caused you, Horace. I am not so well—not nearly so well as when you left me: I cannot leave my bed now, or sit up in it for more than half an hour at a time; and even the writing these few lines exhausts me, so you see you *must* come soon—very, very soon, if—but I need not urge it—I know you will be with me directly—almost, and that I shall have time and strength left to thank and bless you, and comfort you, dear Horace, and that we shall yet talk together—pray together—Oh, yes! and that I shall receive from your hands the pledge of our immortal hope—of our certain reunion.

M. A."

An abler, a far abler narrator than I am, might well shrink from attempting to describe Vernon's feelings as he read this letter, or their first frantic ebullition after he had perused it. For some moments all within him was anarchy and distraction. Agonies of remorse and terror, and images of death crowded upon each other in hurrying confusion, like the phantasmagoria of a frightful dream—and his ears rang with an imaginary cry, "Too late! too late!" that withered and benumbed his powers of action, while a contrary impulse impelled them to promptest exertion. The latter soon obtained the mastery, however, and another glance at the date of the letter—that date now six days old!—acted electrically on the mental chaos. In a moment its jarring elements were reduced to comparative order, concentrated in one overruling purpose. It was but an hour past midnight. Four hours' rapid posting would take him to Sea Vale. In less than half an hour he was whirling on his road thither, as fast as fresh horses could tear over the ground, urged on by the relentless lash of a well-bribed driver; and in spite of various detentions at the several

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stages, while tired post-boys were roused from their heavy slumbers, and galled cattle dragged from their short rest—(Oh! how interminable seemed every moment's delay!)—in spite of these and other trifling hindrances, he reached the hill-top that overlooked Sea Vale, before the stars began to "pale their ineffectual fires," in the uncertain dawn of a dull, cheerless, October morning. The village below was distinguishable only as a black shapeless mass, lying in the deep shadows of the surrounding hills. Only one twinkling light gleamed at its entrance, from the lamp-post of the single inn; yet Vernon strained his eyes through the darkness, on—on—towards the more distant dwellings, till he fancied he could descry the well known gable—the tall round chimney—the two shadowing elms—among the confused and indefinite outline of trees and buildings.

It was but imagination—the rapid portraiture of memory; but his heart beat quicker at the fancied sight, and leaping from the carriage, he left it to pursue its more leisurely way towards the inn yard, and rushing down the remainder of the declivity, sprang over a stile into a meadow path, which would take him by a short cut through a field or two, into the green lane, the back way to the cottage. That way was so familiar to him, that, to his eye, every object was as recognizable by that dim light—that "darkness visible," as it would have been at noon-day; and what emotions—what recollections pressed upon him, as he leaped the last gate into the bowery lane—as he trod once more its soft greensward, now thickly strewn with a rustling carpet of autumnal leaves—as he passed the grey spectral-looking stems of the two old thorns at the corner of the garden hedge. And as he pursued his way along that memorable path, every and each one of those inanimate uncertain shapes stood out with ghastly distinctness to his mind's eye, and he gazed on them with such intensity of vision, as if he could have read in the aspect of those senseless things, some intimation of the nature of that dread certainty which, nevertheless, as the decisive moment drew near, he shrank from ascertaining. As the cottage really became visible, and a patch of its white walls now and then

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discernible through the leafless fence, a cold shuddering ran through his whole frame, and he stopped abruptly, as if an unseen hand had checked his progress. All was darkness on that side the cottage. No light from within streamed through either of the small lattices—but only Nora's sleeping-room lay that way. Millicent's—the sick-chamber, opened to the front. Was it still only the chamber of sickness? Alas! that miserable hope! But it was the more dreadful doubt that still delayed Vernon's onward steps—that seemed to stagnate the very current of his blood, so deadly was the weight and sickness that hung about his heart. A minute more—he had only to turn the corner of that small dwelling, to cast up one look at the well known window, and suspense would terminate; for surely, he said within himself, a light would beam from that chamber if life were there—"if life!"—and then the unhappy man shudderingly repeated—"Six days! and she was dying." But the agony of that remembrance nerved him to desperate resolve, and rushing forward, in another moment he stood facing the chamber window. There *was* light within!—"then life!"—was the rapid overpowering conclusion, and suddenly all strength forsook him—the young and vigorous frame felt feeble as infancy, and tears—quiet tears, rolled fast down his agitated face, as leaning for support against one of the old elm-trees, he continued to gaze earnestly, with feelings of unutterable gratitude, on that pale star of comfort. The light was very pale and feeble, (true emblem, alas! of his most sanguine hope,) for that of the grey dawn began to contend with the waning watch-light, and to give distinctness to the near external objects. A muslin blind was drawn within the lattice, but through its thin texture Vernon could discern the white curtains of the bed, and at the other end of the chamber a high bracket, on which stood the night-lamp, before a large china vase which Millicent had always been wont to keep replenished with flowers or evergreens.

To what trifles (as drowning creatures cling to straws) will the miserable, the almost hopeless, cling for consolation! Vernon's heart beat more equally—his breath came

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freer at sight of that insignificant object, for the vase was filled with verdure. Were the boughs fresh or withered? He drove away the officious suggestion, for his soul yearned for the faintest shadow of comfort. If not *her* hand, Nora's had filled the vase. The dear one herself, therefore, must still be susceptible of pleasure from objects which would cease to interest the dying. Was it yet possible? But though Hope's passing whisper was eagerly caught at, Vernon dared not *dwell* upon its soothing sweetness. He dared not anticipate—he dared not think; and now he would have given worlds to exchange that terrible stillness which yet pervaded all things—that bodily inaction to which he was condemned—for the universal stir of human life, and some occasion that should call upon him for violent corporeal exertion. Any thing, every thing, would have been welcome, which might have afforded scope for the nervous restlessness that now agitated his whole frame, to expend itself, or have gained the slightest relief—the most transient diversion of thought—for the mental fever, which increased with every lingering moment of suspense. But as yet, except the expiring gleam of that pale watchlight, no sign or sound of life was seen or heard within the cottage; and without, so profound and death-like was the hush of nature, that Vernon could have fancied its mighty pulses had stood still, or beat only in his own throbbing arteries.

The gloomy daybreak advanced so tardily, that none but quite near objects were yet visible through the sea of white unwholesome vapour that now seemed melting into drizzling rain—now condensing itself into a solid wall around the cottage, and a few yards of its small territory. The dank moisture clung like transparent glue to the bare leafless branches of the deciduous trees; and, collecting into large globules at the extremities of the heavy drooping heads of the dark evergreens, and along the cottage eaves, dropped to the ground with sullen plashes, dismally breaking, at intervals, the otherwise universal silence.

Vernon still watched the casement of that little chamber, within whose walls his all of earthly interest—his hopes, his fears, his very being, hung suspended upon a dreaded un-

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certainty—a flitting life—a fluttering breath—perhaps at that very moment passing away for ever!

All hitherto had remained quiet in the chamber. Suddenly a figure passed slowly across, between the curtained window and the bed's foot—a tall, dark figure, that could be only Nora's. It was stationary for a moment before the lamp, which, as day advanced, had condensed its pale rays into a small red globe of flame, and that dying spark was gone, when the tall form moved away from the spot where it had been, and advanced towards the window, which was partially unclosed, and a wrinkled hand and arm put forth from beneath the still drawn blind, to secure the lattice.

"And the morning air, so cold and damp, to breathe on that dear sufferer!—Could Nora be so incautious?" And Vernon advanced his hand unconsciously, as if to close the casement; but he was unnoticed from thence, and the female form receded.

"Now, then," thought Vernon, "now in a minute, I shall know my fate,"—and passing stealthily through the little gate, (for he did not wish his footsteps to be heard in the sick chamber,) he advanced close to the house, of which the front door was still fast, and the lower shutters unopened. Awhile he stood beneath the porch, listening for the approach of some one from within, to whom he might make cautious application for admittance; but, soon impatient of fruitless waiting, he moved away to steal round the corner of the cottage, and seek admittance at the back entrance. As he stepped guardedly from the porch, his eyes glanced on a large white rose-tree that grew beside it, and, struck with sudden recollection, he stopped to look sorrowfully on the well-known shrub. There were yet a few yellow leaves upon the straggling branches, and many ripening berries, indicating the past profuseness of its summer bloom. But from the stem on which Vernon's eyes were riveted with painful interest, the flower-sprig he looked for had been recently cut off. "The last rose of summer" had not been left to wither on its stalk, though the hand was far away that should have stuck the late blossom in Millicent's bosom. Just as Vernon turned the corner of the building, he

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heard the withdrawing of a bolt from the kitchen door, and as it slowly opened, he was moving forward with nervous precipitation, when the sight of a stranger startled him for a moment from his purpose, and before he had time to recover himself and accost her, the young girl, carrying a milking stool and pail, was already half way down the garden walk in her way to the field and cow-shed. A word—the slightest sound would have reached and recalled her, but Vernon shuddered and was silent. Again—as the decisive moment drew near, he shrunk from certainty—especially from a stranger's lips. He would seek Nora—he would learn his fate from her. So suffering the young girl to pass on out of sight, he gently pushed open the door which she had left ajar, and stole noiselessly into the kitchen. Its comfortless, disordered state sadly contrasted the beautiful neatness and arrangement, which had been wont in happier days to distinguish poor Nora's peculiar territory. The hearth was heaped with ashes of long accumulation, and the embers of a fire that had evidently burned all night, still emitted a feeble warmth, and dull red light from the lower bars of the grate, to which they had sunk far beneath the trivet and large black kettle, from which issued no cheerful morning sound of bubbling water. Unwashed tea-things, with fragments of bread, butter, and cheese, and an end of tallow candle turned down into the pool of grease which had accumulated in the deep tin candlestick, were huddled together on the slopped and soiled little round table, that it had been Nora's pride to keep bright and polished as a looking-glass. Scattered plates and cups, a waiter with cut and squeezed lemon, and other evidences of late attendance on a sick room, were all noted by Vernon with deepest interest, and if the survey relieved him of his worst fears, he sighed heavily at thoughts of the *best* he had to anticipate. A glass half filled with lemonade stood on a salver on the dresser; he raised, and put it to his lips, (for perhaps *hers* had recently touched its brim,) and as he did so, called to mind her affecting desire to receive from his hand another cup, which now he might be so soon called on to present to her. "If it *must* be—strengthen me for the task, oh God!"

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was the inward ejaculation of a heart that could yet scarcely bring itself to add, "Thy will be done."

Still Nora appeared not; and reasonably concluding, that leaving the young charwoman to attend to household concerns, she had kept her station in the sick-chamber, he stole from the kitchen along the matted passage towards the staircase—but the door of the little parlour being open, he mechanically stopped at it. The shutters had been removed since he looked at the windows from without, and now the formal arrangement of the furniture—the cold, dreary, uninhabited look of the once cheerful little sitting-room, struck him forcibly, with a more painful sense of change, than even the unwonted disorder of poor Nora's kitchen. As he stood on the threshold in mournful contemplation, a shrill sound (one of discordant loudness to his morbidly sensitive ear) broke the deep silence. It was the awaking note of Millicent's canary bird, whose cage hung near the window; and as the creature began to plume itself on the perch, and pour out a more sustained matin in its innocent joy, Vernon looked reproachfully at the unconscious favourite. But his attention was soon directed to other objects (all to him how eloquent!) and at last it rested on a vacant spot on the wall opposite. He started at perceiving that Colonel Aboyne's picture, which used to hang there, had been removed, but only as it seemed to a table in the middle of the room, on which lay a framed picture, together with a white paper parcel, which was placed upon its glazed surface. Vernon felt as if the whole current of his blood rushed suddenly to the heart and brain. A moment he stood gazing as if spell-bound—then, with one desperate impulse, sprang forward, caught up the parcel—ascertained that the portrait beneath was indeed his friend's—his promised legacy! and tore open the paper, which was superscribed in faint and uneven characters, "For my dear Horace." Franticly he tore it open—but *one* glance at its contents, and his fingers relaxed their hold—his sight became dizzy, and he reeled back for support against the wall. What baleful aspect had paralysed him thus? That only of a withered rose, and a long lock of glossy raven hair.

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In some minds (happily constituted are those!) how indigenous—how indestructible—how elastic is hope! After awhile it faintly revived in Vernon's bosom, from the seeming annihilation that succeeded that sudden shock. But feeble, indeed, was the reviving struggle—an expiring effort! a last stand against despair. *Almost* the worst was known. But still a possibility remained, the thought of which perhaps helped to nerve Vernon's resolve to know *all* immediately. Without further pause or deliberation, but still with noiseless footsteps, he ran up the short flight of stairs that led to Millicent's sleeping room—and with cautious tread, and held-in breath, stole to the half-open door. All within was profound stillness—and he stopped on the threshold to listen, and to send forward one fearful glance. The white curtains of the bed were close drawn on the side towards him, as he stood still half behind the door; but he fancied—surely it was *not* fancy—that there was a stir of life—of breath—a gentle and scarce perceptible rustling—as if some one moved. His heart beat quicker, as he advanced a step onward, and then beheld Nora seated in a high-backed chair at the further corner of the bed's foot, towards which her face was turned, and her eyes fixed in the direction of the pillows, with that solemn and profound interest with which we watch the slumbers of those who are "sick even unto death." But, apparently, she had only desisted for a moment from an employment, the nature of which Vernon's first glance eagerly detected. Her fingers still held the strings of one of Millicent's plain mourning caps—he *knew* it well—the broad hems of which she had been running and crimping with accurate neatness, and across her knees and with the arm of the chair lay a long white dressing-gown. Was there not evidence of *life* in those provident preparations? He began to fear—Oh, blessed fear!—that he might disturb the dear one's slumbers, should his unexpected appearance too suddenly startle her faithful nurse, whose strongly marked countenance told a fearful tale to Vernon of all she had lately undergone. But just as he was shrinking back from the chamber, her eyes slowly returning from this mournful contemplation to

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her suspended task, caught sight of his receding figure—and strangely was she affected by the apparition. No word—no exclamation or sound escaped her lips;—nor did she move from her chair—nor otherwise testify her consciousness of his unexpected presence, than by drawing up her tall gaunt figure as she sat, erect and rigid, to its utmost dimensions, and fixing on him her large dilating eyes with a ghastly undefinableness of expression which chilled his very heart's blood, though he had no power to withdraw his own from the unnatural fascination; and when, after a few seconds of that wordless communion, she arose slowly, and standing still and upright on the same spot, without one feature relaxing from its stony fixedness, beckoned him forward with one hand, while with the forefinger of the other she pointed to the bed's head, he obeyed mechanically—almost unconsciously—till he felt the grasp of that cold bony hand; and, following with his eyes the direction of her pointing finger, beheld all that was still mortal of Millicent Aboyne.—The immortal spirit had ascended to Him, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

THE END.

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